

A STRANGER IN PARADISE

J. ANKER LARSEN



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A STRANGER IN PARADISE

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# A STRANGER IN PARADISE

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By <sup>Johannes</sup> J. ANKER-LARSEN

*Translated from the Danish by Ruth Castberg Jordan*

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NEW YORK

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ALFRED A. KNOPF

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TO YTHROA  
BELLIOO BUBDAST  
ON OUBBIBBAAW

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## *Foreword*

Now they are all grown up. Those who at that time were grown are now dead. Soon they will all have disappeared like a glint in a human eye, like a fitting, incomprehensible message from a soul that has passed on and is forgotten. It will be as if these children and grown-ups had never lived. Those that hear this story about them will think:

“Have they really existed? Where was this community; isn’t it only a myth?”

At times there is a flash of evil in a man’s eye; one catches it, feels its depth and effect, and if these flashes are frequent they find their way to hell, where they merge into a flame of hate.

At times one sees a light in a man’s eye, like the morning sun on the dew-drops, reflecting life as it is while one is young and sparkling with a heart full of hope.

One can see mildness in a human eye, a depth unsounded, a quiet as if of the ether. And that is peace in the human mind; it is Sunday in the community, peace is on earth like a bird that rests awhile before its flight, one of heaven’s birds sitting amongst us without fear—but you cannot take it prisoner or entice it to stay.

A glint—and peace has disappeared; one hunts but cannot find it; it is as if it were only a story one had once heard, a hope for something that will never come. Nevertheless, it had existed. The human body stiffens; there is no life or soul left. Yesterday it was there, to-day there was only a glint that will never return. Over the fields are strewn man’s working materials; in the kitchen, household utensils; in the grave, his bones.

## FOREWORD

All these things can be gathered and put in Museums, these things they had, but the human was the incomprehensible glint that was there, then gone, so that one afterwards doubted if it really had been.

This story is almost entirely glints, but they are glints that really were.

“Dear Niels Nielsen,

The above was written in the summer-house in your garden on the other side of the roses, the day after I had promised you to write a book about him. The idea took form from a remark I happened to hear when your wife sat talking to Trine in the same summer-house, while I happened to loiter by the window. She will find the remark at the end of the book. So I wrote these few lines as a foreword—or as an apologia because I have tried to grasp an incomprehensible material.

When I started this book and found myself trying to draw a sketch of him, I found myself in the same mood that you must have felt when he wanted you to carry on the work for which he had given his life. It seemed impossible, and I was tempted to be satisfied with writing a chronicle about your community, as I had threatened to do that summer’s day, when you, Rasmus, and I went on a pilgrimage in your new car. Rasmus, looking at me with his friendly, understanding eyes, smiled sceptically, and said:

‘Do you want to write a chronicle about “the parish that grew into paradise?”’

You said, (with that peculiar, low voice that you all get when you speak about him) ‘If you are going to write about the community, then you must write about him, for he is the new community.’

When I left you, you said, ‘Remember your promise—and keep it.’

## FOREWORD

Now I have kept it, and I know you will not think much of it; in any case you will not think it life-like enough—not as you knew him, but I have done my best with the material you, your wife, Trine and Rasmus have given me; and also helped by his book of records which you so kindly lent me, and of my own knowledge of his last few summers spent by the quarry, when I was with him.

You will, perhaps, be upset by the intimate way in which I mention you and your wife, but it was essential in my story of him. Not even your name was it possible to change. I have not, however, told the name of the parish, and there are so many in the district. No one will recognise you except your own village people, and they know already.

Herewith I send you the book, and like you, wish it were better.

J. A. L.”

HOLTE. MARCH, 1928.



## *Introduction*

THIS is a story about a young man who discovered a new world that had nothing in common with the old, and after much thought on the subject, he willingly gave up every advantage the old world had to offer him, thereby seriously upsetting and disappointing the great future that had been planned for him. When he had grown used to this new world and he had found the everyday life in it, he saw that the two worlds were really one and the same. After this new discovery his sole ambition was to make both worlds live precious in his own life, so that those that came in contact with him would see and understand life's great depth, value and fulfilment. He would not give them explanations but examples. For this he offered all that his great ambition and rich intelligence could have brought him. But even greater sacrifices had to be made: he had to give up the pleasure of living. Just at the time when his great light seemed to have reached its zenith, and everyone had to look up to him as an example, he had to give up his life so that death could add its strong underline to his work.—Perhaps death would have come to him early in any case, but he chose to believe that the alternative rested with him—either to live to a ripe old age, or die in the prime of his youth. With an unselfish love for life, he chose death—but do not misunderstand—he did not take his own life.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about him, nothing striking. Later one found small traits of character in his child life that at the time one did not notice and to which one now points and says: "Yes, there is an instance—that shows what made him as he was."

Some of these small traits and expressions I will put down here.

Near an opening in a wood stands a small cottage where a seamstress lives. In her living room there are three pictures of him, the only ones in existence, I believe. One is taken at the age of four or five years. He wasn't very interested in the process, but one can see he has been told to stand quite still. So he stands very still, like a newly trained puppy that is waiting for the signal to move. His hair is blond and soft, and looks as if it had half decided to curl but then thought better of it and decided it was no use. You put the picture down, but take it up again and again without knowing why. There is no certain feature that catches the eye, it is a piece of art; one sees a new movement continually. This child, who stands so quiet, is sparkling with life through his whole little body. It looks as if his hands, (this peasant child has beautifully formed hands) the round sturdy legs, and even the well-fed little stomach, seemed each to think its own thoughts, that like small rivers ran into the quiet, peaceful pools of his eyes.

The second picture was taken with his comrades at the county school. You have to hunt for him for he seems to disappear amongst them. There are many other faces that draw one's attention before his, but when you have found him, the eye finds rest and does not want to be distracted, and one forgets the others. Standing by his side is a boy of his own age, with an open smiling face and broad shoulders. There is something close and good in the way these two stand beside each other; one feels they belong together—but it is, perhaps, only imagination that causes one to find a symbol in this chance position.

The third picture shows him with his newly acquired student's cap. The unconsciousness that you noticed in the other pictures is missing here. In this the peasant boy has disap-

peared, one sees an over-studied young man from the city, tired, but very sure of himself; a keen face, a sign of a very brilliant future. Since this last, I know of no other picture.

In the country village where he was born and died, there lived, and is still living, a queer old man who repairs watches and works in other peoples' gardens. He was looked upon as a vagabond, although he has lived a lifetime in the same village. It was his early youth and his peculiar manner that helped to create the vagabond atmosphere. He had passed his Theological examination and could have been a parson, which, in his young days, was looked upon by the people as a very high position in life. Instead, he took to the road and arrived at this village as a willing apprentice to any trade. Until they had learned to know him, the villagers did not realise that he was not to be taken seriously. He made jokes about everyone and everything, yes, even of religion, which everyone knew held his deepest interest. He spoke seldom, except with children whom he adored and loved, listening to them, or telling them both serious and funny stories. Little Hans Larsen has often sat in the play-ground listening to Rasmus Snak's stories. And while Rasmus' influence had nothing to do with Hans' later life, one feels sure that it had something to do with his finding himself. His tendency to form in himself wordless pictures, was helped by Rasmus.

To all outward appearances Hans Larsen's childhood was just like that of any other boy peasant, but it was his soul's life that was different. No one knew about that except his little friend Trine, and she at that time found it quite natural. The time came later, when it frightened her until she again found her way into it as far as she could get, and felt at home and safe there.

Even his mother grew anxious at one time, like one often does when one comes across too much soul. She hadn't had

him long, hardly long enough to grow accustomed to the wee thing that had been part of her body and has suddenly become a person of itself. She stood looking at him while he lay in his cradle sleeping. When he began to move she took him up in her arms to feel again his little body close to hers. His eyes suddenly opened. He looked at her with those newly awakened, fathomless, child's eyes, and she felt as if he were trying to find out if she were worthy to be his mother. A frightened, anxious feeling ran through her, that she might be smaller than he. She looked into the eyes that she couldn't read, and her hands shook, so she put him back into his cradle, unable to hold him any longer. She felt she must go out into the garden and ask God humbly to give her strength and guidance to bring up this child as she ought.

This happens, perhaps, to many young mothers who think they have a little living doll to play with and discover that they have a great responsibility towards that new self, a self whose character and fate she can neither know nor settle. Later, when the child forms habits, behaves or misbehaves, and at times gives great joy or irritates, the great moment is forgotten. But twenty years later this mother remembers and the anxious feeling returns; the feeling of helplessness is the same, but this time it was not for herself, it was for his soul and for where it would find rest. This caused her unhappiness.

Now follows his story in small glints, so that, at times, he disappears in other stories, as in the school picture—until he emerges and one sees nothing but him.

A STRANGER IN PARADISE



## *Chapter I*

### THE FOG

OVER by the window stood his father looking out. It was surely morning but all was still as the night. "This is the worst fog we have ever had," said Father.

Little Hans jumped out of bed and ran to the window. Both the outhouses had disappeared. He couldn't even see the pump that stood a few paces from the window. There was nothing in the whole world but a thick, white blanket.

"Where is Mother?" asked little Hans.

"In the kitchen, making coffee," answered his father. It sounded so cosy.

"What is fog?" little Hans asked.

"The clouds that have come down to earth," his father replied.

Little Hans dressed quickly. Outside a great wonder lay waiting for him. The clouds had come down to earth and right above the clouds was heaven. So heaven must also be near.

A few moments later and he was outside in the clouds.

"Don't get lost," called his father.

"No."

He stood still in the wonder—"get lost." One never could get near "the far away" without oneself getting far away and disappearing: that had come home to him. Houses, his own house was in it. He himself stood a few steps from the door and had become far away. No one could see him. And he could see no one. He could hear the klop of wooden shoes in the thick white far away. It must be either one of the stable

boys, or the maids. The noise went from one outhouse to another. Now he heard the voice:

"Where the devil is the stable?"

Little Hans laughed and called into the fog.

"It has disappeared."

"Be careful you don't disappear," answered the voice, "this is the thickest fog there ever has been."

It was great. He stood right in the middle of something that never had been before. He had the word of two grown-ups for it; that this was the worst fog that ever had been, and in the middle of this he stood. Right outside his home he had met the most distant "far away" where no one could see him. He knew his home was quite near him though it was invisible. A great warmth crept into him. The clouds had come down on earth and he knew that heaven was as near him as his own home though he could see neither. But both heaven and home could be reached. The great warmth in him seemed to light something and it shone. He could feel the light right up in his eyes, and smiled.

"I am a lantern," he played, "and there is a big one that is walking along swinging me by his hand, and the light shines out through the glass, and he can see where he goes."

Then he tried to be the big one that walked with the lantern. At first he was frightened but afterwards became filled with joy because now surely he was not playing a game—he could really see a short distance into the fog. He went forward and could see even further. "The big one has polished the lantern glass," he thought, "so it throws the light further." It was the light in himself that made him able to see, because the joy in him reached as far as the light. He became more joyful over his discovery, so that the light shone stronger. He could see that he was now walking into the field. Things began to take shape, there a tree and over there, suddenly, a large rock.

Then he saw how the earth was made. He had learned to read and knew the beginning of his Bible history. "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth"—darkness was upon the deep. And God said, "Let there be light." That happened now. The big one that walked and swung him like a lantern, was no longer the big one, it was God himself who let the light shine. Hans went with a joyful and good feeling letting God continue with his creating, and he saw how grass, corn, hedges, and living things came forth and stayed. When he got home he would tell his Mother: "Now I know how the world began when God made Heaven and Earth."

That reminded him—Heaven, that should be right above the clouds, he had forgotten it while he went around helping God create the earth. He looked up and for a moment didn't quite know the difference between the sun and the light he felt in him, wasn't quite sure if the blue array up there was heaven that had gone up to its right place again, or only his own thoughts that had flown so high. But over there in the hedge he spotted a wild gooseberry bush and in the same moment became a normal little Hans again.

These gooseberries don't look like the gooseberries we have so many of in the garden. These are yellow and could just as well have been something entirely different from gooseberries if they hadn't happened to be on a gooseberry bush. How they tasted! They tasted like—like consecrated wine! He had once seen his grandmother go to the altar and drink wine that was Jesus' blood. "Tastes—"—he couldn't make himself ask if Jesus' blood tasted good, so he asked, "is consecrated wine good?" First grandmother looked like she always did when she told you that she was so old that she was soon going home. Then she said, "That it does—it tastes heavenly and one becomes good after it."

He ate gooseberries from the newly created bush. They

tasted heavenly, and he felt good while he ate—and on the other side of the bush stood another and ate. It was Trine; she was good too.

When they had eaten a while Hans asked:

“Was this bush here before?”

Trine’s house stood just outside the hedge, so she ought to know if it was new.

“Yes, it has been here always,” she answered.

“Always—ever since—since—in the beginning?”

“Ever since I can remember,” she answered. She took a few more berries and said, a little quizzically:

“It’s queer you should ask about that.”

“Why?”

“Because when I came out this morning it looked as if I had never seen it before.”

“Do you know why there has been a fog to-day?” Hans said.

“No.”

“I think that the fog came because everything we have had to be taken up and made new again. Then they were brought back and put down, and then the fog went up to the other clouds again.”

Trine stood and looked at him. She didn’t say anything, but she liked him.

They ate a few more berries, then Hans said:

“I think I know why the fog came and took everything up, so they could be washed clean again.”

“Why?” asked Trine.

“Because Karl Teodor broke in on those old Almshouse people and killed them in their beds with an axe.”

Trine stood awhile thinking, then said:

“But there have been many fogs—and no one was murdered before.”

"But this was the worst fog that has ever been," Hans answered. "Everything was taken away, Heaven came all the way down to get them, and when they came back they were new."

Trine looked at the bush and almost believed.

"Yes, but why?" she asked again.

"Because otherwise, every time we saw an axe we would have to think that one could kill a person with that."

"Yes, but what about everything else we have?" she asked.

"Everything else we have Karl Teodor has touched," said Hans. "There has been a murderer on our earth and we couldn't help knowing it. So God came with the fog and washed everything clean so we wouldn't have to feel afraid of them any more. That's what I believe."

Trine stood quietly looking at him; she didn't say anything but thought: "I do like him."

Hans looked at the gooseberries but could eat no more.

"I'm going home or Father and Mother will think I'm lost."

"Will you come again, some other time?" asked Trine.

Hans looked, first at her and then at the gooseberry bush.

"Yes, I will."

"I won't eat them all," she said.

"I will come soon," he answered. "I came here over the field, but will go home by the road, I can see it now."

Far up in the road stood four boys, all talking at the same time. Hans hurried up to find out what it was all about—perhaps they had also discovered why the fog had come.

It wasn't the fog they were discussing. Fritz and Peter were going to exchange pocket knives unseen. The other two were giving good advice. Both knives were buried deep in their respective owners' pockets, each with a small hand clasped tightly about it.

If they change then Fritz is the winner, thought Hans, because he had seen Fritz' knife and knew that the blade was a bit rickety.

"We must tell one another something about the knives," Fritz said.

"Yes—how is the blade in yours?" asked Peter.

Fritz' weak spot was found. "The blade is a little rickety," he said, "but it has a bone handle."

"Mine has only a wooden handle," said Peter, "but the blade isn't rickety."

"All right," said Fritz, and the exchange was made under closed hands.

When Fritz looked he was furious.

"You said the blade wasn't rickety," he screamed.

"Well it isn't, is it? When there's no blade in a knife it can't be rickety, can it?"

The other two stood by, grinning. It looked bad for they were enjoying something that was not honest.

Hans couldn't understand it—right after the fog too. He could hardly believe that the knives had not been made perfect.

"Did you see the fog?" he asked.

"No, we have just come out," they answered.

Then he understood and felt better. On his way home he could still feel that the lantern was burning. The maid looked at him as he came into the yard.

"You look quite newly made," she said.

Then little Hans knew that God was very near to His people.

## Chapter 2

### A GAME OF CHESS

ONE day when the children were tired of playing and could think of nothing to do they suddenly saw Rasmus Snak going by and called him to come and tell them a story.

"But you know all the stories there are," he said. "I have told you all of them."

"There must be one you have forgotten," said one of the older children.

"What do you want a story for, when the sun is shining and the lilacs are in full bloom? There is no story that can compare with the good sunshine and the smell of lilac."

"It's good but it's no fun," a big boy answered, "and we want some fun."

"Do you? Then I must think hard," Rasmus Snak said, and added: "I will tell you a story that happened before man was made."

"Who told it to you?" asked one of the boys.

"No one. Who do you think could tell me a story that happened before the world began?"

"Then you can't remember it yourself."

"No," Rasmus said. "I can't, but nevertheless, that is the story you said I must have forgotten."

"This happened years ago. It happened before the devil got hoofs—horses' hoofs—and became a devil. It was while he was an angel and the most important angel of them all. It was in the garden in heaven where there is always sunshine and summer.

"One day, while the devil was taking a walk in the garden he came to the place where God was sitting, and had been sitting ever since the seventh day.

" 'You're getting fat,' said the devil. 'You ought to do something.'

" 'Really—what do you think I should do?' asked God. 'I have created the earth and all is good.'

" 'That's fine,' said the devil, 'but there's no fun in that. What we want is something amusing.'

" 'Goodness only knows what you mean by amusing,' God replied.

" 'I'll tell you,' said the devil. 'When I walk around the garden as I am doing now, I know the whole time what's coming next. If I could go and not know what was going to happen, that would be amusing, because you see—'

" 'Keep quiet,' God said. 'Keep quiet a moment while I invent the game of chess.'

" 'He invented it and it was made in a moment. 'There you are,' he said to the devil. 'Now when we play this game neither one will know what the other will do, nor who will win the game.'

" 'No, it's not good enough,' said the devil. 'A: you're all-knowing, and B: you're almighty, so you can get me to make any move you like.'

" 'Ah, but I have limited my knowledge and might in this game.' 'Well, if that's the case,' answered the devil. 'I'm afraid you'll lose.'

" 'That's just what's exciting about it,' God replied.

"So they played and first God lost and then the devil, their luck changing all the time. But one day when the devil was very lucky, he said:

" 'I think we ought to play for something.'

" 'All right! What shall we play for?' God said.

“‘We can play for the garden,’ the devil answered. ‘Piece by piece. I’ve been winning all day to-day, so you should give me a small part down at the end of the garden so that I shall have something to play with.’

“‘Yes, but wait a minute. We must not forget that I am God, and if I sit here and lose most of the garden I won’t be God any longer—except by name.’

“‘What does that matter,’ said the devil. ‘No one but you and I will ever know.’

“‘I wish I had kept all my knowledge to myself,’ said God. ‘I’m not so sure that you aren’t sitting there thinking up tricks. But still, I can always put my foot down if necessary.’

“‘The devil only knows,’ said the devil, and they played on. Sometimes the devil owned the garden and sometimes God. And so it went back and forth.

“‘One day the devil said, ‘This can’t go on any longer. It’s impossible to know when it’s yours and when it’s mine, it changes hands so often that we must keep an account of the game. You write it down.’

“‘I don’t like to write things on paper,’ God replied. ‘Accidents may happen. The paper might fly away, the angels might see it and then what would they think? No, place your men again, while I plant the tree of knowledge.’

“‘And what do you want a tree of knowledge for?’ asked the devil.

“‘When we eat the fruit from it,’ answered God, ‘we shall know at once what is yours and what is mine, and I will tell the angels to keep away from it.’

“A short while later the devil began to cheat; God was too honest to do that, and too good to be cross, even if the devil did play a few dirty tricks. And besides you must remember in this game God did not have all his knowledge so that usually he didn’t notice that the devil was cheating. In the end

every time the devil ate an apple he said he owned more and more of the garden and now he wanted to tell someone about it: he couldn't keep it to himself. He also felt that the other angels ought to rise from their seats for him as well as for God.

"He began to talk to the angels and to tell them what excellent apples grew on the 'tree of knowledge' and tried to persuade them to have a taste.

"But as was usual with all the Angels, they had no desire to try anything that God had forbidden them. In a way it must have been quite easy to be an angel. However, they refused to taste the apples.

"One day the devil said to God:

"'What does it feel like to be almighty?'

"'Wonderful,' replied God. 'When you are almighty you can do any thing you like.'

"'Ah! but can you do anything you don't want to do?' asked the devil. 'If not, you can't be almighty.'

"God looked at him a moment, and answered, not exactly irritated because God is never irritated, but one could plainly hear that he didn't like it.

"'What nonsense is this? Don't make me regret that I have given you a good intelligence, for intelligence is not used for hair splitting.'

"'I only wanted to know how much power you have,' answered the devil. 'You are so good-natured and kind that one forgets how mighty you are. But I think you are mightier than you know because he that is almighty should be able to do all that he wishes and all that he doesn't wish.'

"'So I can,' said God, 'because I am almighty.'

"'If you had to prove what you say, how would you go about it?' asked the devil.

"'I would create man and make him capable of doing both.'

"'Well if you hadn't said it yourself I should never have believed it possible,' the devil replied.

"'I will show you,' said God, and so he made Adam and Eve.

"'Here are two people,' he said proudly, 'and they can have children.'

"'That's the most marvellous of all your creations,' said the devil.

"'That is true,' answered God, 'and you should be proud to take off your hat to those two.'

"'With pleasure,' said the devil. 'When they show that they can do something you don't want them to.'

"'Surely my word is enough,' God retorted.

"'Most certainly,' the devil answered, but he did not take off his hat.

"'I have told them they are not to eat of the tree of knowledge,' God said.

"'That's good,' the devil replied. 'It's the best recommendation the apples could have.'

"'And it wasn't long before Adam and Eve began to eat of them, and from that moment all pain and trouble started.

"'For from that moment they learned something that no doctoring would ever make them forget, they learned a new word.

"'When the angels caught sight of anything new or beautiful that made them feel glad or happy they always said: 'That is yours!' They meant, of course, that it was God's, which was quite right on the angels' part, because everything belonged to God in those days.

"'Now they heard a voice in the garden say: 'This is mine,' and it was the devil's voice.

"'Now, one day Adam went to God and said: 'Look here, all this is yours. I should like to have something of my own.'

“‘Yes?’ said God. ‘Now you are asking for something which I don’t want you to have, but having made you in my own image and made it possible for you to do this, I must give you something to call your own.’ (You must remember that God never uses the word ‘mine.’)”

“So he rang for an elderly angel and said to him: ‘Over there, beyond the garden wall, is a large field that is never used.’ This was the world.

“‘Show these two people the field,’ he went on, ‘and say to them, “this is yours.”’

“‘This is yours’ were holy words; they were a prayer, a song of praise, and in holy words and song of praise the world was given to man.

“Now, of course, we sing other songs.

“Such is God. He was not unfair. He didn’t forbid his people to come back and rest in the garden when they were tired of their work on earth.

“Over by the gate something happened, because no sooner had Adam stepped outside before he cried out, ‘So this is mine.’

“That was a silly thing to have done; he shouldn’t have said that: at once he got into an argument with the Angel. And as two people who don’t speak the same language often think the one is speaking ill of the other, so it was in this case.

“‘It is not mine,’ said the Angel, thinking about God. ‘It is yours.’

“‘That’s exactly what I am saying,’ Adam said. ‘It’s mine,’ and he was thinking of himself.

“It wasn’t possible for them to understand each other, and they kept repeating and repeating the same thing, and in a way they were both right, but that’s what happens when people will argue—they get angry. That was another thing that had never happened before the new word.

“When a man gets angry on his own behalf, he is difficult

enough to deal with, but when he allows himself that privilege on God's behalf he is awe-inspiring.

"The Angel drew his sword so quickly that Adam and Eve only saw a great and blinding flame.

"‘Don't you dare to come near the gates of Paradise, as long as you use that word,’ said the Angel.

"Some people say that Adam and Eve never returned to Paradise because they didn't dare: others believe that they just didn't want to come back and that they preferred to stay outside and say, ‘Mine.’

"There are different opinions about it, but one thing is certain—humanity is still far away from Paradise.

"Now there really was a difference; that which belonged to God and that which belonged to the devil; there was good and evil. The only one that was pleased was the devil. He went to God and said, ‘Now things are becoming amusing! Come and play a game of chess. I am in a devilish good humour to-day.’

"‘I won't play with you any more,’ said God.

"‘Won't you ever play any more?’ the devil asked.

"‘No, I won't,’ God said. ‘The way you cheat. As long as it only concerned me, it didn't matter so much, but when my people have to suffer it's too much, so the game stops.’

"I am sorry to say that was not the end of it, for when God put away the game of chess, the devil figured he could just as well use the earth. Then God had to play his hand for the sake of his people. God plays an honest hand, but the devil cheats and he teaches the people to say ‘mine’ instead of ‘yours’ and thus to make the world evil. It is a long time since they started, and quite a deal has been done since then. Every time a human being goes to the devil—God loses. It is small wonder that at times God grows weary—so weary that his people have thought he didn't exist any more. Large bits of his garden have gone to the devil.

"When the devil saw how well everything was going he

laughed long and well. It was a horrible laughter. It is very difficult for me to give you any idea of his laugh, because, naturally, there is none of you here that would laugh if one of your friends failed in his examination, or if two of you exchanged knives unseen and one got a knife without a blade while the other had two blades and a corkscrew, because if there was, then you would know just how the devil laughs.

"He laughed and hopped around the garden on one foot, with devilish glee—so long that the skin became hard and he at last had a hoof like a horse. Have you noticed that when some people laugh you sometimes hear a queer tone like the tramping of a horse? Well, that's the devil jumping because he is glad.

"God didn't laugh, he felt very sorry for his people. He saw all the trouble and sorrow they caused each other and he wept so much that he flooded the whole garden and had to give his angels wings so they could fly. The tears ran in great streams over the earth so that people drowned. That was the sin flood. In the Bible history it says that the flood came as a punishment because people were so evil. That may be true but it was certainly not because God was angry. God did not seek revenge, but he was filled with sorrow. So he hurried over to the garden wall and called to earth and said: 'Hurry up and build yourselves some good ships, I can't keep from weeping over you any longer.'

"But only Noah paid the slightest attention. Why the others didn't do it—but you know yourselves during lessons what happens when you don't pay attention. When the flood had sunk and Noah and his family had come out on earth again, what was the first thing they did? Noah was thirsty, that was not strange after so many days on the water, for tears are salt water. But the wine tasted good and Noah drank himself full. This is also a way of showing thanksgiving to God for his

gifts. Two of his sons began to fight about the empty tankard. They both said: 'That's mine!' In that way they realised that they were well and safe on earth again.

"Now who owns the larger part of the earth and the garden? You can soon learn that by the language. If it is the 'Mine' or the 'Your' language that is spoken. You need only listen to the tone; if someone says, 'Thank God,' then you hear it said out into the air with no meaning attached, but if you hear anyone say, 'the devil,' you will notice it means something.

"It must be very sad for God, sitting up there in the little corner of the garden that is left to him, where the angels have to squeeze together to find room. I believe it's so small that the angels take turns at flying because there is not room enough for them all at once. It is very difficult for God now. But he is most sad over his people and the way they fare. He feels that it is partly his fault, because he made us. But he can't weep when he is filled with sorrow, because there would be another sin flood and all would be drowned before we could turn to God—those of us that wanted to be good.

"The earth and the lovely garden—the devil stands in them and decides and rules. God doesn't own his garden or his people any more."

Rasmus stopped and filled his pipe. The children didn't quite know whether the story was meant to be amusing or serious. They didn't feel inclined to laugh, but they smiled rather shyly. But Hans—being so small they still called him "little Hans"—stood up very resolutely and said:

"God shall have his garden back—and all his people as well."

All the children laughed boisterously and little Hans looked very red, with tears in his eyes. He thought that they would

all be glad to help God, and now he stood alone amidst laughter. There were a few who stopped laughing almost at once, but little Trine with her small pig-tails was the only one who had courage. She walked over and took his hand and stood there, brave, beside him.

Rasmus Snak took his pipe out of his mouth and looked down sideways at them.

"Yes, yes," he said. "It took two to ruin it all. Perhaps two are enough to make it good again."

## Chapter 3

### THE GAME OF MAKE-BELIEVE

IF God hadn't been so old-fashioned, if he had any sense for advertising, he could have made some signs like this: "Heaven's laundry washes best and lasts longest." And little Hans having learned to write his name would have printed the letters with pleasure, as a guarantee for the Heavenly laundry. The fields and the road that had been taken away by the fog would never again look like any other fields or roads in the world. They would always be clean—not that there wouldn't be a little dust or mud sometimes—but they were good, and they gave of their goodness: he had never walked over them and been naughty.

The gooseberry bush in the hedge continued to look new, and its berries tasted heavenly, year after year, as long as he was able to taste them.

A long time ago—it was in the beginning of his life, many years before they stood, he and Trine, one on each side of the bush eating the heavenly berries. He always went over the field to it; that was what the field wished; but when he was going home, he saw the road lying there waiting for him. It seemed to say, "You're surely not going to forget me?" Then he noticed that his little wooden shoes had promised the road to go home that way.

The gooseberries were only there until there were no more but Trine was always there, and even if they couldn't eat berries, they could play.

Something heavenly washed about their play. They never became so familiar that they became unfriendly; they played

themselves into being good without knowing it. They never touched each other, but the one could lie quiet a long time watching the other's small fingers digging in the ground and feel so happy watching them that it was almost unnecessary to talk. Once in a while they would suddenly look at each other a few moments, and they would each know all about the other. They never tried to hide anything from each other, that was why they were not afraid to play together with everything, and this was how they invented the "Make-Believe Game."

You must not misunderstand the word. It is a mask; behind it lies the secret, beautiful heaven that is only revealed to one person at a time, sometimes to two people if they can look at each other and know all that there is to know of the other. Make-believe was the stupid, smiling mask that was turned to the world and its people, while behind the mask happiness and wisdom lay hidden.

The game came fluttering through the air to them, and they told each other what they caught. That was the game of Make-Believe. Here is a sample of it.

They had walked into a little wood that stood near Trine's house. There they lay looking up between the trees and the sky was a beautiful blue above their light green tops. Hans lay thinking about something he had heard the grown-ups talking about.

At last he said:

"God doesn't live up in the sky."

"Where, then?" asked Trine.

"There is no sky," Hans said. "What you see is just air."

"Is that something we know?" she asked. He nodded.

"How do we know that?"

"I don't know—I only know that we know. Father says so too."

"Where is God then?" asked Trine.

"Well—he must be somewhere else," Hans replied.

"He is a spirit, so I expect he can be wherever he wants to be—like the air."

They both lay there a while, looking up into the blue, not feeling quite happy about the, "we know."

"Then there is no use looking up to Heaven for anything good any more?" questioned Trine.

Hans was about to say "No," but couldn't quite manage it: it seemed so hard on the poor old sky.

"I don't know," he said.

Just then another "make believe" came fluttering down into his head.

"What if God suddenly came?" said Hans.

"Where? Here?"

"He could easily do that; he can do anything he likes. We can play that he is coming."

"Where?" Trine asked again.

"We can't see him because he is a spirit, but we can feel him like something warm touching us."

"I feel it now," Trine said.

"Then he's here. Now we'll ask if it's true that he's moved from Heaven."

This was the way they played.

Hans: "They say that you don't live in Heaven any more?"

God: (Rather shamefacedly, like a man that has just sold the home of his forefathers) "That is so. There was not enough room for me."

Trine: "Doesn't anyone live there now?"

God: "No, it's standing quite empty."

Hans: "It could easily be used for something."

God: "Would you like to use it to play in?"

Trine: (to Hans) "He must be awfully rich to be able to let us use it as a playground."

Hans: "So he is. Isn't he God himself?—Where do you live now that you've moved from Heaven?"

God: "For the moment I'm here, there, and everywhere, looking about for a good place to live."

They kept quiet a short while and then Trine spoke.

"I think he's gone."

"But we've got Heaven," said Hans, "and now let's play in it."

So they went up above the blue.

"Your feet don't get tired of walking," Trine said to him. "The blue is so soft and good."

The most wonderful things were up there, both things they knew and recognised and things they didn't.

"Things never wear out up here," said Hans. "They're newly washed every day."

"Yes—in blueing," laughed Trine.

Here was everything they could wish for.

Hans: "Here's lots of oranges."

Trine: "Yes, and they're made of gold."

"But we can eat them," Hans said, "there's juice in them."

"Gold juice," she answered.

"We'll make holy wine from them for those down on earth," Hans said.

"Imagine if we dropped one and it fell through the blue, down on earth. How surprised everyone would be."

"They would divide it," Hans said, "and when they cut it in pieces it would be just as big as ever, and everyone would grow rich—just because we dropped an orange."

They both laughed heartily, and in this extravagant mood Hans said:

"We'll dump a whole basketful of oranges down on them through the blue."

So they did, and then lay still wondering what people would say.

Suddenly Hans got up.

"Now I think we'll go down and see if anyone has found the oranges."

"Yes, they have," he cried, looking out over the green forest carpet which was sprinkled with sun spots. "There, you see," he said, "that's where the oranges fell and left golden spots on the grass."

Trine sat looking at them and could not take her eyes away.

## *Chapter 4*

### A MOMENT

ONCE more the children had nothing to do; their game was finished and it was too hot to talk.

"If only Rasmus Snak was here," said one.

At that moment they saw him coming along and nothing would do but that he must tell a story.

"What do you want with a story?" laughed Rasmus, "when you're lying right in the sun and it's peaceful and quiet. There's nothing so good as lying in the sun and keeping still."

"We can't keep still more than a little while," replied one of the children.

"I will tell you the story about 'a moment,'" said Rasmus, lighting his pipe. "In a moment I will tell you the story about 'a moment.'"

"Does this story happen in Heaven, like the game of Chess?" they asked.

"You can decide for yourselves whether it shall be in Heaven, on earth, or in hell."

"On earth," they all cried.

"Good," he said, "this story begins in Heaven, continues on earth, and ends in Heaven—like people's lives should do.

"We begin in Heaven. It was just as quiet then as it is in this playground this afternoon.

"Outside the gate sat St. Peter, just waking from his short afternoon nap.

"If only someone would come along," thought St. Peter, 'so that one could have a little chat.'

"He looked all around but there wasn't a soul in sight. Leaning back against the gate for another nap, he got a violent bump when God opened it.

"'Out of the way for the Holy Archangel,' he cried, but when he saw who it was he got up and bowed.

"'Sleeping at your post?' asked God.

"'It's the only thing to make the time pass,' replied St. Peter. 'There's no other job in the world so boring as being porter of the gates of Heaven.'

"'That's why I have come,' said God. 'I need a man and you are the only one we can spare.'

"'That's true,' said Peter. 'No one ever wants to come in. We don't need a porter, unless you want to chuck out a lot of those you let in that time you allowed Mercy to get the better of Justice.'

"'No, I'm not chucking out anyone,' God answered. 'There are few enough of us now.'

"'It looks quite different at our competitor's over on the other side,' said Peter. 'There is—if I may say so—a devilish lot of people.'

"'We have to do something to make people want everlasting life,' God told him.

"'But we have,' said Peter, and he began to count up everything you know from your Bible history, 'even the One and Only, the True, went down to them and I don't have to tell you what kind of reception he got, nor how he was treated. James, John and myself and all the others went around making all the propaganda for everlasting life that was possible. Why even Paul travelled with it both in Asia and Europe—but what good did that do?'

"'We asked too much of the people,' God said. 'This time I want everlasting life put to them in such a way that it will

be just as easy for them as buying a loaf of bread at the bakers; and if you first get a few to take it, others will soon want it.'

"'Ye—es, there's something in that,' replied St. Peter. 'The best advertisement is the talk that goes between man and man.'

"'Here is a bag,' said God, 'and it is full of everlasting life. Go down and get rid of it all amongst the people.'

"'I'm not very good at going amongst people,' said Peter, 'and besides, my recollections as to their hospitality are not of the happiest: but since I must, I will. It will end in my lying down there and dying once more. Then who will open for me when I arrive here and find that I am not here to open?'

"'I will do that myself,' said God, and he turned and called through the gate:

"'Jacob, bring a ladder out here.'

"Jacob brought it and put it down.

"'If only I don't get dizzy,' Peter said, 'it's a long way from Heaven to earth, thank God.'

"God called a host of angels.

"'Help Peter down and hurry back again,' he commanded.

"Peter climbed down, helped by the angels, and watched by Jacob from above, who said: 'Once again I see angels coming up and going down this ladder. Thank the Lord this time I'm on top and looking down.'

"'It was my wish that people should see life both from below and above so that they would be wiser than the angels,' said God, 'but the people have not cared about my wishes—take the ladder away.'

"'Can't I let it stand, Master?' asked Jacob.

"'You can let it stand if you can assure me that only one person will use it,' answered God.

"Then Jacob sighed and took the ladder away.

"Now the devil had been watching every movement from hell through his field glasses.

"'Fie, my great-grandmother,' said the devil, 'what's happening now? Alexander,' he called down into hell and Alexander came up. You must know that Alexander was a Pope that—What are you laughing at?"

"At the Pope," cried the children. "At the Catholics that believe their Pope can do no wrong."

"You shouldn't laugh at the Catholics' Pope when you keep a Pope yourselves."

"We don't," the children answered.

"Oh! And what about Luther?"

"He made Christianity right," they all said.

"Well, William Beck?"

"He improved on Luther's teaching," said Mads.

"No, that was Grundtvig," said Niels.

"You're a lot of little Popes yourselves," laughed Rasmus.

"Not us," laughed Lars and Soren. "Father is an Atheist and only believes in Science."

"Yes, and that he knows nothing about," Rasmus retorted. "But he is certain that it is without a flaw—like the Pope. There is nothing to say to that. People will go on having Popes until they find God. They must have something to believe in. To believe in each other is impossible. Believe in God they can, but don't. Believe in Popes they shouldn't, but do. People are like that——"

"This Pope's name was Alexander the Sixth, who, when he was Pope was so perfect that you could be sure he could never risk doing anything that was right. A wise devil, he was, and that was why the devil trusted him. So he called him now to come up, and said:

“‘St. Peter has just climbed down to earth. I don’t know what he is going to do there, but you are man enough to spoil his mission!’

“‘I have always been able to before,’ Alexander said. ‘Your Majesty surely remembers when I sat in St. Peter’s chair and reverently turned it into a toilet seat?’

“‘It was the Pope’s chair he was talking about.

“‘He went down with a bag like a sower. Now hurry down and turn all that he sows into tares.’

“Alexander let himself down by a rope that was made from hangmen’s cords.

“St. Peter, having reached the earth, was walking along wondering how he was going to start.

“‘Last time, we began with the poor,’ he thought, ‘and we didn’t succeed. This time I will start at the top.’ He began with a count.

“‘I don’t suppose the Count would care for an everlasting life?’ he asked.

“‘Everlasting life?’ said the Count, ‘does that still exist? That is surely something for me—I collect antiques. You’re sure it isn’t a German copy you’re trying to give me?’

“‘There’s a guarantee with it,’ answered Peter. The Count looked in the bag.

“‘I believe you,’ he said, ‘that sort of thing can’t be made to-day—not even in Germany. I’ll have it. How much is it?’

“‘Well,’ said Peter, ‘when God gives you everlasting life it is only reasonable that he should want all your moments.’

“‘All my moments,’ cried the Count. ‘My dear man, I shall surely need all my moments in which to enjoy it.’

“‘There is joy enough in the everlasting life itself,’ Peter replied.

“‘My dear man,’ said the Count, ‘remember it is to go into

my collection. I shall most certainly need some moments to show it to my guests.'

"'Everlasting life should not be shown,' answered Peter. 'It is not something to be worn as an ornament.'

"'My dear sir,' cried the Count. 'Not shown? Listen here. After my death I have bequeathed my collection to the state. Imagine how it will affect the tourist traffic when they read in "Baedeker" "In our country you will find the everlasting life." I surely must have moments to make all this known. Think what it means to the nation. Surely you are patriotic? Where do you come from?'

"'I am Jewish,' said St. Peter.

"'Ah, is that so,' said the Count. 'In other words it's a question of money.'

"'The Count seems to forget that Jesus was a Jew.'

"'The modern Jesus isn't a Jew,' said the Count. 'He is—well—I don't know exactly what he is, but he is well known to all the best people. But—about this everlasting life—what do you want for it in money?'

"'Farewell,' said St. Peter, and left. 'It won't do to start at the top either,' he said to himself. 'I had to climb down the heavenly ladder; I shall also have to climb down the social ladder.'

"He had not finished canvassing the Barons before it was clear to him that he would have to alter his price, so when he came to landowners he allowed five and a half per cent off people's moments.

"No one would buy.

"To the property owners he allowed fifty per cent.

"'All trading and offering of goods here is forbidden,' said the first one. 'I receive direct from the church.'

"The next one wanted to know if any of the big estates had purchased and when he found they hadn't, he wouldn't either.

"Then he tried the small farmers, allowing seventy-five per cent. The first farmer wanted to know to what political party he belonged. St. Peter, never having played with politics, said, 'None.' The farmer thought at once that Peter's everlasting life could be of no use.

"The next one said he couldn't even give him a quarter of his moments as he didn't have that much free time as it was. The animals had to be looked after even in the free time, and it was all he could do to get to church every other Sunday.

"All the others said the same.

"Peter had walked a long time. He was tired and his clothes were dusty and worn so that he didn't invite much confidence and the dogs barked at him.

"He came to an inn in the doorway of which stood the host, yawning.

" 'This man must have a moment to spare,' thought Peter, so he went over to him and offered him everlasting life in exchange for one single moment.

" 'That's a bargain,' said the man, 'come in and sit down while we agree.'

"They sat down, and Peter began to undo his bag. It took a little time because it had not been opened since he left the Count. When he got the knot undone he saw that the man was sleeping, for there had been a late night at the inn. Peter touched him lightly on the shoulder.

" 'You were to give me a moment,' said Peter.

" 'It's no use trying to wake father once he's fallen asleep,' said the man's wife.

" 'But it means everlasting life,' Peter said.

" 'If it meant our house and home and a year's profit,' said the wife, 'it would be impossible to wake him until he has had his sleep out after a late night.'

"Peter now went to the smith.

"'Have you ever thought about everlasting life?' he asked.

"'Not yet,' answered the smith. 'I am young and have good health.'

"'Good health only lasts a time,' said Peter. 'Everlasting life lasts for ever, and I can give it to you cheap.'

"'Let us talk about it,' said the smith, but just at that moment a well-dressed gentleman walked into the smithy. It was Alexander.

"He took a horseshoe out of his pocket, saying:

"'Can you make me fifty of these? You can ask what the devil you please for them, but I'm in a hurry, so you'd better strike while the iron's hot.'

"'You'd better get along,' said the smith to St. Peter. 'I haven't any time now. This means money.'

"Poor Peter shuffled off. Alexander tossed a bag of money to the smith, saying: 'You can leave them outside when you've finished. They will be collected,' and with that he hurried off after St. Peter.

"The smith hurried with his work and when he had finished he counted his money and saw he had enough to last him all the next month without work.

"He sat down outside and lit his pipe. Now he had plenty of time but St. Peter had gone, and was standing outside a cobbler's, looking at the loose sole of his shoe that the cobbler wouldn't mend without pay.

"'Silver and gold I have none,' thought St. Peter, 'so it will have to be put down on the business account. I can only pay what I have,' and he offered the cobbler everlasting life to mend his shoe.

"'I can't say that I need everlasting life at the moment,' said the cobbler, 'but it can't eat any bread, and it does no harm to

have it. It is true one never knows when the moment of death is coming and it may be too late to be converted. Come here with your shoe.'

"At that moment Alexander walked in.

"'I'm sorry, I'm afraid I have come to the wrong place,' he said. 'I wanted to be measured for a fine pair of shoes, but I see you only do repairs.'

"'Go away,' cried the cobbler to St. Peter.

"'You can have fine new shoes made here, Master,' the cobbler said, turning to Alexander.

"'Can you swear to that?' the other asked.

"'The devil take me, if I can't,' said the cobbler.

"'Rest assured,' said Alexander, and put out his foot.

"St Peter walked on down the road until he came to a grass bank where he sat down and looked at his shoes. After a short while Alexander came along and sat down beside him.

"'Honoured colleague,' he said.

"'I beg your pardon,' replied St. Peter.

"'Don't you recognise me?' asked Alexander. 'I had the honour of being your successor.'

"'Before I became a traveller I was a porter in heaven,' said St. Peter, 'but in my time that position was not well enough paid to allow anyone to throw money about the way you do.'

"'That's right,' said Alexander. 'I thought they should have given you a better position up there, considering that you were once bishop of Rome. It was down here, not up there, that I took over after you.'

"'Who are you?' asked Peter.

"'Alexander the Sixth, your Honour.'

"'God free me,' cried St. Peter, 'are you that boulder of a Pope. Lord deliver me—is it possible?'

"'Yes—may the devil take me,' said Alexander, 'for that matter, now, I'm on the same mission as you.'

"‘It isn’t possible,’ mumbled St. Peter.

"‘In my time I sat on your fine chair and arranged and dispatched my affairs very well,’ Alexander answered.

"‘It isn’t possible,’ mumbled St. Peter, ‘but I’m afraid it’s only too true. How can you dare to say that you are now travelling on the same mission as I?’

"‘You are an agent for everlasting life,’ said Alexander, ‘but you have only one kind to offer.’

"‘There can’t be more than one kind of everlasting life.’

"‘Oh, can’t there?’ said Alexander, holding up two bags. ‘In this one there is Headway—that’s for the idealists who think of others besides themselves. In this there is Progress for the materialists who only think of themselves. I have nearly sold out.’

"‘When he heard this a great sadness settled on St. Peter, for he now knew something it will be difficult for you to understand, but I will try to explain as well as I can.

"‘You terrible swindler,’ cried St. Peter. ‘Are you going to corrupt the whole of life as you corrupted the church?’

"‘Do you deny that everlasting life means Progress and Headway?’ asked Alexander.

"‘St. Peter could not deny this, but ‘there is a secret attached to it,’ said he, taking a deep breath.

"‘Yes,’ said Alexander, breathlessly. ‘I have often been a little embarrassed over you, but for the moment I am glad you are an unskilled fisherman. It was a bit hard on the Pope’s position, but we others had good educations, so we managed to wash out the first impression of good Christianity. There you sat in all your simplicity knowing the secret but unable to put it into words. I also know, and I could put it into words, but I won’t.’

"‘Ah! dear God,’ cried St. Peter, as he sat sadly thinking of the four great world Empires—you know them of course?’

"The Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Greek, and the Roman," cried the children in chorus.

"Right," said Rasmus. "And what became of them?"

"They were ruined," all the children said.

"Yes," said Rasmus, "that's what poor St. Peter was thinking. They were ruined through the two bags Alexander was holding."

"Through Progress and Headway?" asked the children.

"Yes—they went straight ahead to hell."

"Yes—but—" began Lars, "—that's surely what we are all struggling for to-day—I mean Progress and Headway. Do you think that our world will also come to ruin and end in——?"

"That was the reason St. Peter felt sad and anxious," replied Rasmus.

"Yes, but Progress and Headway are good things."

"They belong to everlasting life," nodded Rasmus.

"How can they make Empires go under?"

"That lies in the secret which Peter couldn't and Alexander wouldn't tell. I will try to give you an idea of what it was. Listen, when you are thirsty and you get a glass of fresh, cold well water—what do you say?"

"We say: 'Ah!'" answered Lars, for he was always quickest to reply.

"But if you got boiled water in the glass—what would you say then?"

"Horrible!" Lars said.

"Yes but it's water all the same," went on Rasmus.

"But it's not worth drinking?" Lars asked him.

"That's exactly how it is with the spring of life, everlasting life," said Rasmus. "There is both progress and headway, and humanity can't stop thirsting after it. But when the secret is missing, then life is just progress and headway; it's 'boiled'

and when you have it, you notice it is not what you were striving after.

"That's that—but we are not sitting in the school room, we are on the playgrounds, and St. Peter and Alexander are both sitting on the grass bank, both feeling homesick.

"It is the middle of the dog days, St. Peter is moaning from the heat and Alexander is freezing.

"‘I'm going home to-day,’ said Alexander.

"‘Don't forget the horse-shoes,’ said St. Peter. If it was a kindly reminder, or if he wished Alexander a heavy load, I don't know.

"‘I promised the smith they would be collected,’ answered Alexander, ‘and so they will be, for they are ordered for His Majesty, but I don't have to attend to that. We have plenty of help. At one time I thought I should have to chase after your heels like a wandering Jew, but that's quite unnecessary. You have been crowded out of the market. If you should meet Ahasuerus, remember he is a cobbler. Maybe he will mend your shoes if you promise to relieve him of his everlasting life. I'm sure he will be dead tired of it.’

"Without more ado Alexander went off and bought himself a broomstick, as he wanted to ride home.

"‘It's a good thing he's gone,’ thought St. Peter, ‘now I can trade in peace.’

"He went to the miller and asked if he would give a moment in exchange for everlasting life.

"‘Certainly,’ said the miller, ‘when the wind blows the mill runs itself, so I can always give you a moment. Let's have some.’

"‘I only sell for cash,’ said St. Peter. ‘I'm pretty well acquainted with conditions down here.’

"‘Here you are then,’ said the miller, ‘here's a moment.’

"St. Peter put on his heavenly spectacles to look at the mo-

ment as other people would look at a banknote they weren't quite sure about.

"‘It's false,' said St. Peter, throwing the moment back again. ‘It doesn't say God on it: it says Miller Madsen. You have only been thinking that you were doing a good stroke of business, you weren't thinking of God, you were only thinking of improving your own circumstances at His expense.’"

"The miller resolutely took the next moment and handed it to St. Peter.

"‘It's no good,' said St. Peter, and so it went on with every moment.

"‘I have no intention of cheating,' said the miller. ‘I didn't know that the value was so poor, but since this is the case, we can just as well sever all connections with heaven, our moments are without value when they are to be compared with the everlasting life market.’"

"‘There are still some who have the old real moments left,' Peter pointed out. But there weren't.

"On most were written the holder's name. There were a few that had God written on them but they were only copies.

"‘I must wait for better times,' thought St. Peter. So he waited until right now. The rest of the story ended three or four days ago. It was last Sunday.

"It was about six months ago that St. Peter decided to trade with people at their own value, and take the moments for what they were worth. There had come a great boom in everything and he figured that he would soon have finished. He made a terrible discovery, for he found that modern people didn't have a moment to spare. They stand with one foot in the moment that is past, and the other in the moment of the future. As far as their souls were concerned they lived on old debts with new loans.

"St. Peter gave up hope and he went to the wireless station and sent a radiogram.

"‘THE PRESENT MOMENT DOES NOT EXIST ON EARTH,  
PETER.’

"He sat down and waited. A short time after he got an answer.

"‘TRY CITIES AND GIVE AWAY FREE,  
GOD.’

"So Peter went to the capital and to all he met he said:

"‘What do you say to everlasting life?’

"‘Humbug!’ they answered, for they had all bought Progress from Alexander.

"St. Peter walked on to one of the suburbs. That was last Sunday. A great many motor-cars, motor-cycles and ordinary cycles rushed past him.

"‘I suppose they are going to church,’ thought Peter. He had noticed a charming little church just outside the town. ‘I am growing old,’ he murmured. ‘I am a fool. It is in church, of course, I shall meet the people who are looking for Everlasting Life. See how they are hurrying there.’

"But all the motoring folk rushed past the church.

"‘Where in the world are they going,’ thought Peter, and as a cyclist passed him just then he called:

"‘Where are you all going at this mad pace?’

"The cyclist turned, and laughing, said:

"‘To hell.’

"‘I’m sure he’s right,’ thought St. Peter; ‘but you wouldn’t think they’d be in such a hurry to get there—I shall never get home, now.’

"While he stood there thinking about it, a drunken motorist ran over him.

"And that was how he got home.

"God stood at the gates of Heaven to receive him.

"There is nothing to do about it,' said St. Peter. 'We can just as well shut up shop; our competitor has crowded us out.'

"Give me the bag,' said God.

"When Peter handed it to him, he and God stood staring at each other.

"The bag was empty.

"I'm so sorry, you must forgive me,' said St. Peter. 'I lay there dying and forgot all about the Everlasting Life.'

"It doesn't matter,' said God. 'Now it's down there and no one knows about it. Perhaps someone or other may find it quite by accident.'

"Now you know that Everlasting Life is here, it has leaked out into the air, and any one of you may get it, and the one that gets it can't be mistaken about it, he will know that the spirit of God has entered into him.

"Do you think you have understood any of this story?"

"It's like the secret that St. Peter couldn't and the Pope wouldn't tell," said one of the boys.

"The secret," said Rasmus, "yes, that's a story of its own which I will tell you another day. It may happen that one of you will run across the Everlasting Life; he will know the secret at once and can tell all the others. Are there any more questions?"

"When you said that humanity couldn't give God a single moment, that wasn't true," said Mads.

"Do you think you could?" asked Rasmus.

"Of course we could," they all cried. "You only have to forget yourself for a moment."

"We will try and see how easy it is," said Rasmus.

"There goes Dorothy, the baker's wife. Now while I call her

those of you that can give a moment's thought for her, can have anything they like out of her basket.

"Dorothy, come here with your basket."

Dorothy only took a moment to get to them for she understood it meant business.

"What will you all have?" asked Rasmus.

It sounded like a company of soldiers when the command was given to "Fire."

"Honey cakes, sugar cakes, currant buns, lady-fingers, Bismark cakes, buns." The answers shot out of their mouths.

"All these you've figured out in the moment it took her to get here?" questioned Rasmus. "Then you can see, not one of you thought of Dorothy, only of the cakes she had in her basket that you wanted—there will be no business to-day, Dorothy."

Dorothy went away and the children looked very foolish.

"That was too bad," said little Hans.

"Yes, you didn't get any cakes," said Rasmus, "but you didn't deserve any either."

"No, but Dorothy couldn't help it," said little Hans, "and she thought she was going to sell something."

Rasmus gave him a side glance and got up, saying, "There is still hope. Hi! Dorothy!" he called, "for Hans' sake you shall have all you want. We don't want to disappoint Dorothy."

He still looked at Hans carefully and said slowly:

"St. Peter ought to have your address."

## Chapter 5

### SUNHEAVEN

A HOUSE was being built, the workmen had eaten their lunch, drunk their beer and smashed a bottle on a stone and were now looking at the sun through the glass. One tried to stare at it with his naked eyes.

"No, you can't do it," he said, rubbing them.

"No, our eyes aren't good enough for that," said another.

Little Hans stood by, listening.

In this instance, he was too old to misunderstand what he had heard, but he had just read a story about a man who had such wonderfully good eyes, because he was so good himself. This gave Hans something to think about and when he came home to his mother, he asked:

"Is it because our eyes aren't good enough that we can't look at the sun?"

"That's easy to understand," she answered.

"If we are very good will our eyes be better too?"

"Yes, of course," she answered, busy with her washing.

"If we were good enough, we could look at the sun?"

"I suppose we could," she said. She was only half listening and had only heard something about being good and getting our deserts, so one could hardly go wrong answering, "Yes."

Hans walked away, but after a while he came back.

"If I never do anything I'm not supposed to, am I a good boy then?"

"Certainly, I have told you that so often."

Off he went determined to try it. To-day was Thursday, he

would try to be good for a week—and next Thursday he would look at the sun without a glass.

It was a long and tiresome week. Sunday was the worst day of all. When he came out into the garden in the morning he saw that the cherries were ripe. Only the child who stands in front of a ripe cherry tree and doesn't dare to touch them knows how delicious they taste.

He could, of course, ask if he might, but he was pretty sure of the answer: "You know those cherries are for preserving, so you mustn't touch them." If he took one without asking and was found out, he would only be told—"Remember you mustn't."

His hand was already on its way, but stopped—he knew that he mustn't.

His little face looked very serious; suddenly it changed and seemed to light up.

"I really didn't want to do it—because I didn't take any."

That was good; he could feel it right up in his eyes. They felt good. If he could only keep it up until Thursday. Then perhaps his eyes would grow stronger and better.

It was easier than he expected; his triumph over the first temptation made the others lighter, and he walked undisturbed past the cherries and many other temptations.

Wednesday evening while getting ready for bed, he asked his mother:

"Have I done anything I shouldn't, in the last week?"

"Not that I know of," she answered, "but you should know best."

"Nor that I know of," he said.

"Then you have been a very good boy," she smiled.

It says, somewhere in his lesson books, that he that hath a good conscience is a sound sleeper, but that wasn't the case. He didn't sleep because of his good conscience, and because to-

morrow was Thursday and he was afraid it might turn out a gray day. In that case he would have to go on waiting for a sunny day. That of course was the only right thing to do, but it was very trying keeping a watch on oneself every minute. While lying there awake, he thought of such a lot of tricks he wanted to do, it was very difficult not to laugh, but he managed to keep very stern. "He that sleeps commits no sin," said his lesson book. If he could only go to sleep and forget the tricks.

At last he slept, but awoke very early in the morning. Through the window he could see that the sky was clear and it was growing lighter. If one only dared to get up and try at once. But he knew he was supposed to stay in bed until seven o'clock. The clock hung on the wall in front of him and ticked slowly. It seemed impossible for any clock to go so slowly and not lose three-quarters of an hour in the hour. He had to lie quiet another two hours. However, such was not the case. All the tricks of the night before came back and he had a terrible fight with them until a quarter to seven. At ten minutes to seven he fell asleep. At eight o'clock his mother pulled his nose, saying:

"You have overslept to-day."

He started to cry.

"Then I have done something I shouldn't."

She comforted him, saying:

"It doesn't matter, darling. You couldn't help it. Only good boys would feel so badly about it."

She had never seen him dress so quickly.

"Don't forget to chew your food properly," she had to remind him at breakfast. He chewed in time with the clock so as to be sure that he was doing right.

"You are an obedient boy," she said at the end of breakfast as she left the room.

It was really too bad, feeling glad she had gone. He only felt like that because now nothing could happen that shouldn't. He could get out in a hurry.

There was a sand pile, right in the sun and he threw himself down on his back and looked up.

The disappointment was terrible. A whole week's hard work and no result. It must have been those cherries, but he hadn't taken any; although that evidently made no difference. He hadn't been good enough. If he couldn't become good enough in a week, he would never be good enough. He felt very sad about it and he told God so as he looked up to the sky again.

What was that? If he had seen God in person he couldn't have been more surprised or happy. He was looking straight into the sun, right in the middle of the great golden disk. And it didn't hurt him.

He kept on looking and finally realised that there was a very fine, thin cloud covering the sun, so thin that you could hardly see it.

God must have felt sorry for him and hurried up the little cloud to show him that he had been good. He would show God that he knew how to appreciate his kindness—he would keep on being good, and perhaps soon God wouldn't need to hurry up a cloud.

He lay a long while looking at it, until he was so happy that he had to shut his eyes with all the pleasure. Even then he saw the sun just the same. There was sun over the whole world—a thin, living, golden cloud that moved in all directions.

"If I could only get up into it," he thought, when suddenly, a long, golden ray shot into him.

He took hold of it, it didn't burn, it was soft and cool and pleasing to hold on to. He climbed it, and found himself in the middle of the sun.

He never dreamed that the sun would be like this. It wasn't

stationary, it was living, glowing air. It moved in all directions out over the whole world, and he floated on this golden cloud, light as a feather. Soon he met a boy, about his own age, living, and clothed in silver. Every time this boy thought a new thought, he got new clothes—from himself. It wasn't only his clothes that were made of sun, the boy was, too, both inside and out.

"You must have just arrived," he said.

"Yes, I climbed up a ray," answered Hans. "Is this where God lives now?"

The sun child nodded.

"A while ago he lived in the blue sky, but now we live here."

"Where is he?" Hans asked.

"Here," said the other.

"Yes, but where?" asked Hans. "Won't I be allowed to see Him?"

"You will be able to see Him when your eyes are good enough," answered the sun boy.

"I have been good a whole week," said Hans. "I mean—there were some cherries that I didn't take, and a few tricks that I didn't play, but I very nearly did both. When do you think my eyes will be good enough?"

"When you are entirely sun," smiled the boy.

"Like you? Can you always see him?"

"Always."

"If only I could stay here forever."

"Then we could play together," said the sun boy.

Hans was so glad that he felt he must give the boy something, but he had nothing and he couldn't think of anything that the sun boy didn't have.

"This is entirely different from what I had imagined," he said, "and there's much more room."

"Yes, you only see through a little round window," answered the sun boy.

That explains it—only a little round window.

"Will you really play with me if I stay here?" he asked.

The sun child nodded and now Hans had to give him something.

It was a good thing he hadn't eaten that cherry. Now the sun boy could have it. He held it in his hand.

"If you please, that's for you."

The sun child smiled, and there were two cherries—that was good then he could give them both away.

"They are for you," he said.

There were suddenly four.

"They are for you—all of them," cried Hans.

Then there were eight.

"Eat them quickly before any more come, I haven't room for more in my hand," said Hans.

The sun boy laughed and at once they were all in little Hans' mouth.

How delicious! Eight lovely, forbidden cherries, that one was allowed, ripe and full of juice!

He was having a dreadful time with the stones and nearly swallowed them. Finally he got them gathered together on the middle of his tongue and spat them out all at once—and woke up.

"Are you spitting at me?" laughed Rasmus Snak. He had been standing looking at him.

"I was dreaming," said Hans, and he couldn't help telling Rasmus all about it; it seemed as if it were really true. When he told of the cherries and how they multiplied every time he gave them away, Rasmus said:

"I see you have been in the Sunheaven."

"How did you know when you weren't with me?"

"Yes, because here on earth we only get something when we take it—in the Sunheaven you get something when you give."

"Yes, but can you understand it?"

"That's easy enough," answered Rasmus. "The sun is always giving—with light and heat. It shines on both flowers and weeds."

"Then weeds must be good—when they come from the sun."

"They also come from the earth," said Rasmus, "and all is not good that comes from the earth."

"Then it would be better if the sun could miss the weeds," Hans thought.

"The sun gives," answered Rasmus. "It gives goodness without any personal feeling. Get rid of the bad so that the sun can shine on something better—that's what we must try to do. That is what we are here for."

"Yes, but why does the sun shine on that which is bad?" insisted Hans.

"So that it will look nicer and you can pluck it out without getting cross about it," Rasmus answered. "If you get cross about it, the badness grows in you."

Hans' mother came out to call him.

"You are always busy telling the children stories, Rasmus," she smiled.

"Yes," he answered, "that's all I'm wise enough for."

"You mustn't listen too much to all that Rasmus tells you; there is no sense in what he says and it only does you harm."

That that wasn't quite true, Hans discovered the same afternoon.

She set him to weed the garden. Hans hated weeding. He was furious with the weeds and when he had been working about a half hour he felt as if he would like to fight someone. Then he remembered that the sun had been shining on them.

"I know there is a little of the Sunheaven in you," he

thought, pulling out a very bad weed, "so there must be some good in you, but we need room for something better so you'll have to go. Good-bye to you. This is why I'm here."

He weeded and smiled, worked and enjoyed himself and was soon finished. His mother gave him five öre because he had finished so quickly.

Out on the road he met a little boy to whom he had given a good thrashing, after an hour's weeding.

"There you are," he said, "that's for you."

He gave him the five öre and wondered if it was going to become ten öre.

In a sense it did, because the boy was very poor and had never had five öre of his own before. He was so happy and felt rich enough to buy half the world. So a little of the sunbeam had come down on earth.

A few days later Hans met two boys, a big and a little one. The little one was crying because the big one was threatening to hit him. The big boy had a round head and a blue cap. Hans thought he reminded him of a weed with a large head and a small blue flower in the top. This weed didn't prick you if you didn't touch it. It had one good point, it had a little of the sunheaven.

"He won't hit you," said Hans to the little one.

"What do you know about it?" said the big boy.

"He hasn't done you any harm," answered Hans.

"How do you know?"

"He wouldn't dare to."

The big boy grinned.

"I'll scratch him, anyway."

"You say you will but you won't."

"Why won't I?"

"Because you're too kind." The big boy stared at him with open mouth.

"What am I? You're a queer fellow. Where'd you get that idea from?"

"I can see it."

The big boy stared with surprise and grew red in the face with embarrassment. He didn't know whether it was because of himself or the little fool Hans.

"Do you want to see a bird's nest?" he asked suddenly.

He showed them one in the hedge. There were three small eggs in it. They reached out their hands to take them, but the big boy said, "No, don't."

"I'm not sure the birds would like our touching them," he said apologetically. At the same moment his eyes met Hans'. and he saw plainly what Hans was thinking. "There, you see, you are good."

"You are an artful fellow!" he said, turning his back on them and walking away.

Hans began to think that perhaps he could be "all sun." He walked most of the way home with the little boy.

"Aren't you glad he didn't hurt you?" he asked.

"He's a brute," said the little one.

"But he didn't touch you."

"He's a brute," mumbled the little boy.

"Aren't you glad he turned good and let you go?"

"He's a brute, anyway," continued the little one, "and you just wait till I grow up. He'll get so many beatings that he won't be able to stand up."

Hans lost his temper and, rushing at the small one, hit him with his closed fist, in the face.

Afterwards he remembered he had made the big boy stop from hitting.

He walked home with his head down, thinking about the sunheaven and the weeds and how they come to grow in you, if you lose your temper.

## Chapter 6

### GOD?

IT was a Sunday afternoon, when Hans, talking to Trine, established God's existence. But there's no use talking about God if you don't know Hannibal.

"Who is Hannibal?"—"Have you seen Hannibal?" were the questions the children asked each other. A few had met him: no one liked meeting him when alone, and even if there were several together, no one dared speak to him. It was an enlightened parish, so that dwarfs, trolls, the hell-horse and the phantom wolf had long since left there; Hannibal made up for all of them. He was real, but an unearthly atmosphere surrounded him. He lived "nowhere"; every now and then he turned up, sometimes to beg, sometimes to sell rat-traps and sometimes to steal.—But no one ever reported him if anything was found missing. Perhaps his name was Hannibal; but in the people's eyes he wasn't a proper man, a parish member with a family name. He was a tangible something with the name Hannibal. None of the children understood the name, but the sound of it when the grown-ups spoke about him, went into their ears and lived in their imaginations.

"Have you met Hannibal?" Those who hadn't shook their heads and shivered. Those who had nodded and shut their faces like a mask; you could never get them to tell any more about the meeting than,—“it happened” there, or then, and the given place seemed to the others as though it were haunted. When they passed it they would point and say, “It was here Peter and Jens met Hannibal.” What happened you could get neither Peter nor Jens to tell.

It was not good to talk about him.

They all knew that Kristen Madsen (who couldn't learn anything at school and later behaved very unnaturally) had met him alone. You didn't ask him about it because if you did he screamed like a stuck pig and looked as if he were losing the little sense he had left. . . .

Spring had come and Hans was out of doors. It was a wonderful day, the world's birthday. The earth had put on its fine, new clothes, and was showing all its lovely gifts; they were spread over the fields, and the valleys were filled to overflowing. The earth was glad, the birds were singing and the people should have been doing the same. Hans' little feet walked along the path amongst all this wonder that grew, for there was constantly something sprouting that wanted to be seen, and so the path went on until the very outer edge of the village. There stood a willow that had "pussy willows" and wanted him to see them all. Of course he had to stop; he understood that very well. Never in all his life had he understood anyone or anything as well as this willow that showed its new "pussy willows" for him. He understood it so well that he almost believed he was inside it pushing out the "pussy willows." He stretched out his arms and cried, "Hurray!"

He suddenly discovered that he was standing in front of the willow, without a single "pussy willow" on him. He looked darkly at the tree.

"Aha, so you threw me out," he said, laughing.

"Yes, that's the way to take it," answered the willow. It most certainly understood the game of "make-believe."

That was fine; he had been wanting to play it for a long time, but thought Trine was too big to play it now. The best of all was that no one could hear him playing with the willow, because they talked inside themselves. They were a good

pair, Hans and the willow, because the willow was hidden inside its old bark just like Hans was inside his old clothes.

"You perspire under your bark, don't you?" he asked. "So do I under my clothes."

"Yes, but I am new and green on top," said the willow.

"My whole head is full of new things," laughed Hans, "and I'm always being told that I'm green."

"I have new 'pussy willows' on my top," it said, "what have you got in your top?"

"Ideas," answered Hans; "you don't grow, but I do."

"I'd like to see you grow if every year they chopped off your head," said the willow. "You would fall over dead, finished, but I stand and grow a new top with new 'pussy willows' the next year."

"What kind of a one are you?"

It wasn't the willow that asked the last question, it sounded like a human. He looked up at the voice. A shadow fell over the willow, it made itself small as possible, holding tight to its new sprouts.

Before it stood Hannibal.

He knew it was he because no one else was dressed like this. Besides, a rat trap hung on a string around his neck. Hannibal continued standing in front of him so Hans had to stop—everything in him stopped, all his thoughts, his hopes, his wishes broken in a moment like flowers crushed under a heavy shoe. His senses became uncertain, and he stood there not knowing what to do. Yes—there he stood, and there stood Hannibal; that was the only clear thing in the world. What was going to happen now? Would he lose his head and become weak-minded like Kristen Madsen? Or was he about to die—like those other children Hannibal was supposed to have killed and eaten when he was hungry and passing through other villages? There was a long knife in Hannibal's belt.

"Who are you?"

That was like a question asked by any ordinary person—like one's self; Hannibal looked like an ordinary person and could talk. And must be answered, as any other man was answered.

"I am Erik Larsen's Hans," said he with a very thin voice.

Hannibal stood still looking at him. High, high up, far above, those eyes looked down at Hans paralysing him. It was like when you dream of great danger and try to fly for your life and find your feet rooted to the ground. He couldn't understand those eyes, they looked neither bad nor good. They weren't bad, so he felt he must scream for help, with the hope someone might hear. They were not good, so he felt he could say good-bye and walk away. There was something in them he didn't recognise. Perhaps it was a dreadful hunger, that has often driven sailors to eat their friends. The big knife was linked on a chain and seemed to call up to Hannibal: "Here I am!" Hannibal must have heard it because he nodded his head and said:

"So it's Erik Larsen's son you were."

Were! So all is lost. Hannibal rules the road; it seems so long, interminably long. Home is so far away that it doesn't seem to matter. He is alone with Hannibal, and Hannibal says:

"So Erik Larsen's blood is in your veins?"

Blood! So Hannibal is hungry. Now his hand is hanging right beside the big knife. He will kill him just as one slaughters a calf! He sees again the little new-born calf lying at home in the yard, with a knife in his throat. He doesn't only see it, it happens, and it is himself that is the calf. The blood runs out of the calf's throat, but it is his own blood. The calf's eyes begin to grow glassy, he feels it in his own. It seems such a long time since he left home, with all his blood in him, and

was Erik Larsen's Hans. It doesn't sound like his father's name: with Hannibal's voice it sounds like a stranger's, indifferent. Everything becomes strange, things glide away from him, are uninterested. The village is miles away, and in a certain yard lies one with glassy eyes in a pool of blood. "That is Erik Larsen's Hans, he is dead now," say the children and walk away. It's easy for them, they can walk away. They can go all the way to the cemetery and stand looking through the fence at the grown-ups in their black clothes, burying Erik Larsen's Hans. "Now he's gone," murmur the children. "He met Hannibal and in Hannibal he finished."

Yes, he has gone. But he still exists, there isn't much of him, but he's still there. He isn't Erik Larsen's son any more, who was so clever at school. Ah, no, he is so very little, as small as one can be, a little living dot in a dreadfully hazy world—but a dot that can't be disposed of, that must exist, because it is just that little dot; God himself has created this little dot, that he can feel. He can feel that God is watching this little dot, now, at this very moment, not only looks at it, but looks through it out into the world, and no one would dare to do it any harm, when they see God's eye looking through it.

Hans looks with quiet, steady eyes up at Hannibal. Hannibal looks, takes off his hat to him and goes away. Hans stands watching him and suddenly wishes he had given him the ten öre he has in his pocket.

Hannibal should have been given something while God's eyes looked at him. But of course he got something good within himself. Hans turned back to the willow.

"It looks like the gooseberry bush," he thought, so the make-believe started again.

"Gooseberry bush?" queried the tree.

"Yes, you don't have to be ashamed of that—because it had heavenly berries. You look different from what you did before, you know."

"Is that so odd?" asked the tree. "I have been standing here for many years and have waited for some one to come along and see me with God's eyes. It does me good, right into my marrow. It does the same to Hannibal."

"It does me good too," said Hans, "because God's eyes saw everything there was in me and I felt good all over, and I think God will continue to look through me, until I have done something wrong again."

"Look at me on the other side too, please, before you do anything wrong," begged the willow, so Hans moved around it.

"You look different from this side," laughed Hans.

"Yes, but it's me all the same," answered the willow. "Move around some more."

"Well I never!" he called from the other side. "If I couldn't count, I would have said that there were two of you. You don't look like yourself at all, from this side."

"No, it doesn't look like me," answered the willow, "because it is me."

Hans walked all around again and came to the spot he had just stood at.

"Yes, now I recognise you again," he nodded. "It's funny, if I hadn't walked all around you, I would have thought that I knew exactly what you looked like. But you are much more than I thought—you are a whole forest."

"That's about the finest thing you could say about a single tree," laughed the willow. "But be careful you don't say nice things like that if you don't mean them. And remember in the future that a willow tree must be seen from all sides before you know it. That's why trees are round. It does them good

to be looked at all around; there's a comforting feeling about it."

"For the one that's looking, too," said Hans. "I can feel God is still in me, if only he would look through me again."

God did. Hans' eyes rested on the opening into the field, and he thought:

"There's the entrance into the garden of Paradise. I think I will go in."

He went in, and God continued to dwell within him, so of course it became the garden of Paradise.

"I should like to try sleeping here," he thought, and lay down on a grass bank. No pussy willow was more closely associated to its willow tree, than he was to the earth he was resting on.

Half an hour later he awoke. He lay there without thinking or worrying about anything, except this happy living dot, through whom God had looked out upon the world. After a while he felt a restless something moving about within him, something that seemed as if it were a question. It grew nearer and nearer his consciousness; suddenly it burst within him, saying out loud.

"Where in the world am I?"

In a strange field sat Erik Larsen's Hans, not knowing time or place. He felt he had better get home.

The dot? It vanished in the surprise and rush for home—not forever, but to come back again at odd moments and to vanish again. It came back occasionally when his soul was all knowing.

It was the same with him as with others who had met Hannibal. No one could get him to talk much about it; his answer was the same as the others: "It happened at the other end of the village, where the big willow tree stands." At times he would add, "I'm not a bit afraid of him."

Usually he didn't say this because it sounded boastful. The little dot was very much alive at these moments. But most of the time he was just Erik Larsen's Hans.

The most ordinary things could bring "the dot" to life. One Sunday it was the old "Bornholmer" clock. It was in the afternoon while some neighbours were calling on his father. Hans sat listening to their voices, while they were quietly talking about this and that, monotonous as the Bornholmer clock in the corner, quietly ticking away. Tick—tick—tick, passing the time away. It was an old friend, like the neighbours, and stood counting the seconds, while they talked about the corn crop and the animals. Tick—tick—tick—tick—it went, they heard it, but were not disturbed by its monotonous ticking, before there suddenly came a tick that sounded different from the others—because it was not followed by another. "Tick," said the voice in the clock, then it stopped dead. Quite a while after that tick seemed like a soul taking leave of this life. All faces were turned to the clock, the talk about crops and animals stopped; they looked like people holding their breath from fright, their faces empty like the face of the clock; time had passed away, a dead eternity gaped at them. The room was as quiet as a churchyard.

His father got up, gave the pendulum a push; the "Bornholmer" clock took up its task again, like some old woman who had been nodding over her knitting. Tick—tick—tick, it said, a wee bit faster, or brisker, but still the same well-known sound. The faces around became more animated than before; in Hans it was so strong that he had to hide it. The new tick was just like the opening in the field, by the willow tree—the same field and tree, but different. The same old tick, but different, as if the clock had never ticked before. The same field out there but also the Garden of Paradise. The way fields look when God looks at them through our eyes.

If Hans went out there now, perhaps it would look the same as that other time. He didn't reach there, however,—he met Trine on the way, walking along looking through bits of glass. She stopped, said nothing but went on looking, first through one bit and then another in the restless manner we all have when there is something one tries to keep one's mind off.

"Has anyone done anything to you?" asked Hans.

"No."

"What's the matter then?"

She stood still, looking through the glass, took it away, looked down at the ground, and said:

"No one's done anything special."

"So you can't tell me what it is?"

"Ye-es, I could."

"Even if it's nothing special?"

"I could tell you but I don't like to," she said.

"I don't understand. How can you if it's nothing special?"

"Because it's about God," she answered.

"God?"

She nodded, and there they stood looking at each other.

"Yes, but——" he began.

"The miller was at our house this morning. You know he has learned so much that he can do arithmetic sums with letters."

"Yes, I know," said Hans. "They say he can, but it seems to me, it must be necessary to have figures."

"No, he does it with only letters," she said. "Father has seen books about it at his home, but he couldn't understand it. No matter what father asked him to figure, the miller figured it out in letters: father saw him—things you would think it impossible to work out."

"Well, but what's that got to do with God?"

"The miller says there is no God."

"Has he worked that out?"

"Ye-es, he did, but he said so much that Father couldn't answer, and at last he said:

"'We will call God X,' then he figured it out and said:

"'The answer is  $X=O$ . That means God is nothing.'"

They walked along, neither paying any attention to the other, Trine with her bits of glass, Hans with his thoughts. At last he said:

"They're not correct."

She looked up at him.

"What are not correct?"

"The miller's figures."

"But you haven't seen them."

"No, but I know there is a God." The tone came, so full of knowledge that she believed, but said:

"Tell me, how do you know?"

"I will, but you must wait a little."

They walked along in silence. At last he stopped, shaking his head.

"I can't."

She looked down and turned her head away. He discovered a tear on the cheek nearest him, and then another followed it; the first tear loosening itself and dropping to the ground. Something suddenly loosened itself in him and he said quickly:

"Perhaps I can if we play make-believe."

She looked up, glad, and shamelessly dried the tears away.

"Let's go where no one will disturb us," he said, so they climbed over a fence into a field.

"You must not talk or I won't be able to do it."

She promised to be quiet.

"You must play it with me, like we used to play make-believe," he demanded. They had grown away from the game and they both longed for it again, but the one wouldn't speak

of it to the other, so neither of them dared to ask the other to play it. They were both in the second year at school.

"Give me the bits of glass," said Hans. "Look now, the blue one is Niels." Blue was Hans' favourite colour, and Niels was his best friend. "The green is Kristian Nymard, the yellow is Mads, and this grey one that you can't see clearly through, is Kristen Madsen—after meeting Hannibal, and you—you are God."

"I?"

"Remember we are playing make-believe. You have to play properly," he said a little irritably.

Yes—that's just what she had wanted to do for a long time.

"Remember now, you are God and the field is the world. Now you look well at it and when you have seen enough, say so. You must not forget you are God! Now look!"

She sat looking.

"Now I have seen it," she said, when she meant she had looked long enough.

"Right," said he. "Now you have seen all there is to see?"

"Yes."

"Now you should look at it in another way, so it looks entirely different."

"I can't do that, it looks like it is."

"Oh, can't you?" he answered a little proudly.

"No."

"If we had been playing school you would have had to sit after time for being stupid. But this is different, you can't do that, because you are God—and you mustn't interrupt me. When I met you you were walking along looking at the road through coloured glass, if it wasn't to see things looking different, I don't know why you were doing it."

"That's true," she answered. She felt comfortably at home with him, and liked his wisdom better than the miller's.

"Now you are God, and want to see things as others see them, so you create Niels—there he is." He handed her the blue glass.

"Look at the field through him, and tell me what you see."

"A field with a little stream—and rocks upon the hill."

"That's Niels talking. He sees the stream and the rocks. It's all blue but he doesn't mention that. But you are God, you smile into your beard and say: 'Niels is blue so his world is blue. Now I want to see through Kristian.'—If you please, here he is, tell me what you see."

"A stream and rocks."

"Yes, Kristian says the same as Niels. They are green, but he says nothing about that, he and Niels know they are seeing the same place.—Here is Mads."

She took the yellow glass, looking through it, but said nothing. He pushed her elbow.

"Well?"

"What is it?" she asked.

"You're forgetting to play!"

"Oh yes—there's a stream and some rocks."

He laughed.

"Your voice was just like Mads' when you said that, and you're quite right not to mention it was yellow—here is Kristen Madsen."

"I can't see anything very plain, it's all greyish," she answered.

"That's right, Kristen can't see anything unless he's been told by someone. Now look without any glass, what do you see?"

"Naturally, I see everything—as it really is," she murmured.

He leaned back against the fence—with a look of triumph on his face.

"There, now, do you see?"

She looked questioningly at him, suddenly she understood that the game of make-believe was the explanation and her face grew very long.

"Ye-es——" she said, hesitatingly.

"Ye-es," said he, definitely.

"Yes but—this is only something we say," she observed. "We say that God looks at the world through us—that doesn't mean that he really exists."

"But we know that he exists."

"Yes but—is it possible for anyone to be sure of it?"

"I am sure of it."

"Are you really sure?"

"Yes."

She regarded him intently.

"Tell me, how have you found it out?"

He thought, "I will tell her the secret."

"You know, I met Hannibal," he said.

She nodded and shivered; she couldn't take her eyes from his face.

"I was more frightened than I thought it possible to be, and I was sure I was going to die, and I am sure that Hannibal was hungry."

She sat there, thanking, in her inmost heart, the God whose existence she doubted, because Hans was sitting alive and happy beside her.

"I suddenly felt something away inside me, a weeny little light spot, not any larger than a dot—a little dot—and I knew God's eye was looking into every corner of me and out through me, into the world, and I couldn't be frightened any more. When I looked up at Hannibal, he tipped his hat and went away."

"So Hannibal was afraid of you?" Surely here was something wonderful.

Hans nodded.

"Yes, the moment I looked at him. You see it wasn't me he was frightened of, but when he saw God's eye looking at him through me, he removed his hat. He knew at once."

She sat looking at him with eyes full of worship.

The experience was so vivid to him that there was no room for triumph or childish importance. He said quietly and simply:

"God stayed with me a little longer after Hannibal had gone away, and I saw the fields for the first time as God sees them."

"How was that?" she asked.

"It was the Garden of Paradise," he said simply.

"Afterwards I saw the fields as I usually do, I couldn't see God's way any longer, but I remembered what it was like."

"Really?" she asked, breathlessly. "If only God would look through me, so I could feel sure."

"Ye-es," he said looking at her—he was filled with wonder, for suddenly her eyes looked different, they weren't the same eyes he knew so well. They were always so observant, Trine's blue eyes; they looked as if they always wanted to ask you a question. But now they weren't questioning, they were seeing—seeing from within, and they saw—it was—yes, it surely must be him. This was the way he looked—from the outside!—It couldn't be true! He felt embarrassed, he wasn't as good and kind as all that. Not really! It was necessary to become like that. Now that he had seen himself he would never be satisfied until he had become as her eyes saw him. There was something that had to be washed out of him. "Forgive us our trespasses!" he thought. And he was forgiven. He could feel that all he had done that was wrong was erased, like figures from a slate. There came something from her eyes that cleansed

him. He could feel it. Then he understood. He took off his cap and folded his hands.

She folded her hands too. And they sat there awhile, quiet, without a word, and not looking at each other. They sighed so deeply they both heard it, and looked up like two people just awakened.

"Now you know," he whispered. "He has looked through you too."

"Yes," she answered, and in her thoughts, not aloud, she added, "and I looked at you when it happened."

They got up and walked hand in hand over the fields. Every now and then a wave of gladness swept over them and they tried to talk but could not.

When they reached the gooseberry bush with the heavenly berries, standing in the hedge in front of her parents' home, Hans said.

"Now I've walked all the way home with you."

"Yes, you have," she said, shyly.

They both thought how poor words were, but it was best like that.

Giving his hand a little squeeze to remind him of the wonder, she slipped off around the hedge and out of sight.

## *Chapter 7*

### THE SECRET

THE children were in the playground, fighting. Mads, who came from the Mission school, said that Niels wouldn't go to heaven when he died. Some would have felt very depressed at hearing this, but not Niels. Being very quick tempered and hot-headed, he answered that Mads talked so much about hell, any half-wit could understand where he was heading for. Some would have become thoughtful at this, but not Mads. He was as furious as Satan, so these two flew at each other's throats. The trouble was that they were of the same size and strength and might have gone on and on, but Niels thought of something better: he struck a match in an attempt to set fire to Mads' hair. Mads pulled out his knife to stab Niels. The chances of either getting to heaven or hell immediately were very good, when one of the other children cried:

"If we don't stop them soon there will be a devil of a mess."

All the boys rushed in and parted the Christian champions. There they lay battered and resting after their battle, when Rasmus Snak appeared on the scene, and found the children trying to bind the wounds of the warriors.

"What's been happening here?" asked Rasmus. The two sons of the Athiest told him about the religious war, "—but we all parted them, and gave them such a good trouncing that there was only life enough left in them to be able to continue breathing."

"Will you tell us a story while we all get our breath?"

"All right," laughed Rasmus. "It's better to listen to a story than to fight. I shall tell you a story about breathing properly."

He filled his pipe and began:

"It was at the time when God created Adam—have you ever thought how economical God was—He only used a bit of clay.

"I have heard it said that it was poor stuff to create man from, but you have only to look at some people to realise that they are made of dirt. Others say it is a wonderful example of what the earth can produce, if treated properly. The thing is, how should earth be treated?

"Well, God knew, and gave an everlasting example of it when he created man: He breathed life into him with his own breath.

"This is the beginning of the story, showing you what a breath really is. This was the secret that St. Peter knew, but couldn't tell, and Alexander wouldn't tell, when they were sitting on the grass bank at the side of the road. Now I will tell it to you.

"There lay Adam, still nothing but clay, all formed but without life. God then breathed his own breath into Adam's nostrils, God made him inhale, and there was life. But it was God's own breath he drew, and therefore he would never die. As long as we can breathe we shall never die.

"Adam had received two inhalations, one in the lungs to make life, and the other in his soul, that was everlasting like God himself. Those two breaths entered as one into Adam but to him there was no difference between the temporal and the everlasting. God's life flowed into Adam through his breath.

"Then something happened. It happened as soon as Adam

had been given permission to call the world his, and God had said to his Angel, 'Take them to the gate and show it to them.'

"If you ever feel that God wants you to do something good, do it at once, because you never know what might happen if you stop and hesitate. Neither did the Angel.

"He wanted to tell the other Angels that the people were to inhabit the world. You know it's always rather exciting, if you know anything new, to be the first to tell it. Just as they were passing under the tree of knowledge, the Angel got the idea of telling the others first.

"Stand here a moment while I speak to the Angels,' he said.

"Up in the tree the devil was sitting eating apples, to find out how much of the garden he now owned. He reached for a branch with a lovely red apple, and swung it right past Eve's nose.

"What a lovely apple,' she cried, 'shall we eat it?'

"We mustn't eat the fruit on this tree,' answered Adam.

"If you had asked if we might have a few, I'm sure He would have said "Yes," pouted Eve. 'You know how kind God is.'

"Yes, but I didn't ask him,' Adam retorted.

"It really doesn't make any difference when we know He wouldn't have refused us,' said Eve, and so she picked the apple and ate half of it. She could have eaten all of it, but she didn't like to be the only guilty one, in case God should be cross. Adam must at least take one bite.

"Uhm!' said Eve, handing the apple to him. It is always dangerous when a woman says, 'Uhm!' to a man, especially if she at the same time offers him something she has, so he can say 'Uhm!' with her. There are not many who can refuse her.

"But Adam was not to be tempted."

"Yes—he ate," cried one of the children.

"Yes," answered Rasmus, "so he did, but it was not for the sake of the apple. How about you three that stole the apples out of that garden the other day? If I remember rightly there was one of you that didn't want to when the time came, but you got him to eat one of them so you could say he was with you. How did you get him to do it?"

"We called him a coward," said one of the boys, very shamefacedly.

"He couldn't let himself be called a coward," said Rasmus.

"That's just what happened to Adam. Eve looked him up and down, saying:

"'I thought you were a man.'

"She turned away from him looking up into the tree where the devil was sitting, looking very swell.

"Adam took a bite of the apple.

"That's how it all started.

"Tell me—that day—when you all stood waiting to steal the apples—didn't you hold your breaths just a moment?"

There was a short embarrassed pause, when one of the boys answered grumpily.

"You always do when you're afraid of being discovered."

"Adam and Eve did the same," said Rasmus.

"The lungs' breath one can only hold for a minute, because it is, if I may say so, only a short breath, and one must continue to breathe in and out. The breath of the soul is everlasting and you can hold that as long as you like.

"Adam and Eve didn't dare to draw that, because if they did, the spirit of God entered into them, and they felt his presence, and thought, 'He knows what we have done.'

"They held the everlasting breath so long that they forgot all about it, and when they didn't feel God's spirit any longer, they forgot Him too, and when their bodies became old they died. That's the way it happens with all of us, day after day.

"When one doesn't breathe deeply and full, the whole of the lung is not in use, and that part that isn't used dries up, and dies like a flower without sun or rain. When one doesn't breathe the everlasting breath our soul dries up. One cannot entirely wipe out that which God has made, because a little bit of the everlasting still remains; just enough so that the soul lives after death.

"Their souls became very asthmatic and in bad condition before they reached heaven. They looked consumptive because there was not much heavenly spirit to feed them on. The longer time went on the more decrepit were the souls that came to God, and Heaven was like a hospital.

"One day God called Jesus to him saying:

"'This cannot go on any longer. It's obvious that the people are ruining the earth, but as I have given it to them nothing can be done about it, but I won't have them turning heaven into a hospital.

"'All the Angels have had to take up nursing. I can't ask them to do anything for me any more. The other planets have to have some care, but this little planet with these people have nearly ruined the whole show.'

"'Is there anything I can do to help?' asked Jesus.

"'Yes, there is,' answered God, 'but I haven't the heart to ask it of you.'

"'My greatest happiness is to serve you,' said Jesus.

"'There are not many who can say the same.

"'Could you go down to earth amongst these people and teach them to breathe properly?' asked God.

"Jesus looked at him, with his face full of sympathy. Why should God need sympathy, you ask? Because he suffered at the thought of Jesus down amongst those people.

"You know what it's like to walk into a cow-shed in the morning while it is being cleaned. It isn't a place where you

would like to sit eating your breakfast. The farm hand doesn't notice it because he is used to it. It is the person who comes in there, out of the fresh morning air, who is struck pretty forcibly in the lungs. It is like that coming from Heaven down on earth. It is a process of being slowly smothered.

"Why is it like that? People's bad breath. When there is something internally rotten the breath is bad and the atmosphere is not very nice. I have already told you about the breath of the soul. You can well imagine the air was foul, and not a very fitting place for God's son.

"He wasn't thin skinned where His Father's will was concerned. He and God lay a long time looking down on the earth, for they had to find parents for Jesus.

"‘If we can only find them,’ said God. ‘It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack.’ Jesus’ parents had to have clean hearts.

"God was almost ready to give it up. ‘Can you see any?’ he asked Jesus.

"Jesus pointed down at Mary and Joseph.

"God looked at them awhile and said:

"‘If it’s to be anyone it will have to be them.’

"It was early morning when God and Jesus began hunting; it was evening before they found Mary and Joseph. And when you know that for God one day is a thousand years, you will understand that the earth wasn't overcrowded with clean hearts.

"Mary and Joseph stood outside their cottage door, watching the sun set, crimson and gold, deep red below and a crown of gold above.

"‘Here we stand looking at all Solomon's glory,’ said Mary.

"The sun went down and the stars came out on a high dark-blue heaven. Mary folded her hands.

"‘It is as if I were in a temple,’ she said, ‘everything seems holy.’

“‘You are Holy,’ sighed Joseph.

“They had stood thus a long while when Mary whispered: ‘Ssh!—we can hear our souls’ breath.’

“Joseph, looking at her chest and hearing her breathing said: ‘It is wonderful to breathe.’

“They stood there inhaling deeply together, as though they would breathe in the heavens, and their eyes began to shine like stars.

“They looked into each other’s eyes and the one became as the other. They were like Adam and Eve, before they had learned the difference between body and soul and understood they were naked, and felt ashamed. They had breathed with both body and soul at the same time.

“Joseph said:

“‘Once you were the one I loved, and now——’

“‘Now we are as one. There is no you or me,’ continued Mary. They went indoors together while they were still as one. It was one, not two, that wanted the other. That was why Mary remained maidenly and pure as if she had never known a man. So pure can love be, and so pure is the love of the holy spirit.

“When Mary knew she was with child, both she and Joseph understood that this child was more than themselves and that she was a holy temple where this child should rest and rule alone.

“They lived accordingly. It says so in the Bible, in slightly different words.

“You know that the Child was born and put in a manger. Perhaps you don’t know that above the manger in the roof was a little hole, so a little bit of the heavens could be seen. Just there shone a large star.

“That was the first thing the little Jesus saw, when he opened his eyes on this earth. All the lights of Heaven shone

in his eyes. They had not been shadowed by all the beastliness that meets the eye on this earth.

"That light shone up on the star, when he looked through the hole in the roof, and it was that light the wise men of the East saw, the three holy kings. It wasn't the star itself that shone like the sun. The light still lingered around it long after Jesus had taken his eyes from it—just like the sky is still light awhile after the sun goes down.

"Jesus grew up and no one was like him. What he was like? Remember the long, grey winter, when the ice and the snow sports are finished. The ice is no longer clear and shining, and the snow is grey and dirty. The weather is both wet and cold. Nothing is right. You go along with your hands in your pockets feeling heavy and grumpy. The weather has been like that so long, you think it will remain like that forever, and so it continues a long time.

"Then suddenly one day there is a smell of hyacinths. You breathe in and think, 'it makes me feel as clean and pure as a hyacinth myself.' Something marvellous goes through you and in the air lies the promise that everything will be better again. After the hyacinths come the lilacs and roses. Life is wonderful, you love everything you feel and see.

"This was like Jesus. The everlasting life flowed out from him like the perfume of hyacinths, lilacs and roses. People around him inhaled it and became healthy and good, for a marvel had come into their lives.

"There are people who only see the hyacinths' and roses' flower value in money, and the power that money can give. These people live by explaining and trading in the everlasting life, without having it themselves. They became more anxious and cried louder than ever about what people should eat and drink and how often they should go on their knees praying for everlasting life—when they die.

"Jesus went up to them and said: 'It is not that which enters the human body, but that which comes out of it which is unclean.' So he breathed on them.

"Then they became frightened and said:

"'If this person is allowed to go around indiscriminately breathing on people, they will find out that we, the holy, have no breath. We have given people the promise of everlasting life after death. But if this man goes around giving it to them now, we are finished. They will all turn to him.' They tried to find incriminating evidence against him. They couldn't prove that he was committing any sin. People turned good if they just saw him, and he told them that it was everlasting life which was worth more than anything on this earth. Hearing this, the so-called holy people cried:

"'Oh, we have him now.'

"They went to Pilate, who was sent out by Caesar who ruled over the world at that time, saying:

"'Here is one who jeers at Caesar's world, and he who jeers at Caesar's world, jeers at Caesar, and he who jeers at Caesar shall die.'

"'That he shall,' said Pilate. 'Let him be brought here to die.'

"Jesus was brought before Pilate. While Pilate sat looking at him, Rome and Caesar grew further and further away, and he thought, 'If Caesar could see the life that radiates from this Jesus, he would be very anxious to take part in it, and think it of more value than all his provinces put together.—I don't see anything bad about this person,' he said.

"'Don't you? Then you are not the right man for your position and will surely lose it,' they answered.

"Who dares to risk their position for the sake of everlasting life?

"This woke Pilate up, and he answered:

"I see that he makes people dream about things that do not exist, and while they dream they neglect their duty both to Caesar and his world. Kill him!"

"They did. But they could only kill his body. The everlasting life had again come upon earth through him, and lived in his disciples, and can never be destroyed. There will always be a kingdom that is not of this world—a kingdom where the everlasting breath means life.

"There were so many beings convinced that the devil got anxious. 'What the devil shall I do?' thought he.

"After thinking a long while he laughed, saying:

"The wisest thing is to do the same as God—with a slight change of course.'

"So he looked out over the world to find himself some parents. It was easier for him than for Jesus, and it wasn't long before there appeared a very sharp priest, who drew considerable attention to himself and got a very high position. That was the devil himself.

"He went to Caesar and the bishops and said:

"People go about breathing the everlasting air in a most haphazard manner. It must be done correctly. If one does not do things correctly, one does them wrong. It's better not to do the thing at all than to do it wrong. Let us, who have studied these matters, therefore decide which is the correct method of breathing everlasting air and forbid people to do it any other way.'

"So it was. They decided on the correct method, and the priest who gave them the good idea, was honoured by all people, and after his death was made a saint.

"He sat in hell regarding his work with great pleasure. 'It's going very well,' he said, 'but I can still improve upon it.'

"He let himself be born again, to show the people that there could be more than one opinion on the subject, and that the

method they had was not correct. Many people followed him and hailed him as a great prophet. He laid himself down and died and sat in hell with great pleasure regarding the people arguing continually about the differences of opinion, and so taken up with their differences that they forgot to breathe it at all.

“‘It’s going very well,’ he thought, ‘but I can still improve upon it.’

“There was soon a change when the people no longer breathed everlasting air, they decided it was impossible to do so—before you were dead, and then only if you knew the right way while still alive. In the excitement of the difference of opinions about an air that was not breathed any more, they killed each other, stabbed and set fire to one another.

“‘It’s going very well,’ laughed the devil, ‘but I can still improve upon it.’

“He found himself new parents, grew up to a very wise man, collected all the different opinions there had been upon the subject and proved that the different opinions killed each other, and that there was no such thing as everlasting life.

“All the wise men followed him and fought the everlasting life worshippers. They in turn fought each other about their opinions. After this there was no peace on earth.

“‘Now it’s really going well,’ laughed the devil. ‘I can live in hell during the winter and on earth in the summer and feel quite at home.’

“Ever since, people have always been fighting about something they haven’t got and possibly can never have. And in a while they grow tired of it and want to lead quiet and respectable lives and breathe the air properly. In moments like these, you sometimes find someone who will listen to the story of everlasting life.”

Rasmus stopped, filled his pipe again, and lighting it, peeped

at the children through the smoke. They were all very quiet. After a moment one of the boys asked:

"What is the truth about this?"

"What the truth is?"

"Is there everlasting life or not?"

"There is—yes, for without it we couldn't exist."

"If it is here, why haven't we got it?"

"Because we don't believe it is here—You don't come out here looking for a krone if you don't think there is one lying here."

"Yes, but if there were one lying here, some one would find it and pick it up."

"There are also some who have found everlasting life," said Rasmus.

The boy sat awhile, thinking, not quite satisfied.

"Yes, but—when we haven't got it ourselves——?" he asked.

"That's right," said Rasmus, "then it is only empty words and lies to us when others say they have it. We all have it in us without knowing about it. It's just like when you are asleep, you don't do anything. It's just as if you didn't exist—you're alive just the same when you're sleeping.

"There are some who are partly conscious of it—like yourselves in the morning, when you have just opened your eyes and you lie there drowsing, but you know it's daytime. You're not entirely awake nor up yet and you don't really feel like it either. Sooner or later you will have to make a decision.

"I will tell you a story about a man who made a decision—although he didn't know that he had come to any decision or what he had decided. I will tell it like a fairy tale, although most of my story is true, and one of the two men is still living.

"Once upon a time—for you it would be a long time ago, but for me it is as if it happened a few days ago—once upon a

time there were two young men. They loved two young girls, who were sisters. The two young men were very good friends, they were soon to be married, and they were glad that their future wives were sisters.

"There came an epidemic of a very treacherous sickness, and attacked one of the sisters and she carried it to the other.

"The two young men were sure the sisters would soon be well again, but at last they began to get anxious. And soon the doctor came and said to them:

"‘You must be prepared for the worst.’

"They were so upset they couldn’t find peace anywhere. They wandered restlessly about until they came to a large forest. ‘I feel like one who is afraid of the dark,’ said one. ‘And there seems to be something following me. It is the thought that she, who is so young and beautiful, really can die. My mind won’t rest. I am afraid of life.’

"‘I know,’ answered the other, ‘that is only your thoughts, but what if it really happens?’

"They stood there looking at each other, not knowing what to do, until one said to the other:

"‘Shall we pray that they may live—perhaps if we both pray——’

"‘Yes,’ answered the other, ‘let us both pray.’

"They each thought that the other’s prayer was better than his own and would perhaps have more weight. Each thought the other a better man than himself. As far as human judgment could tell, one was as good as the other.

"On their knees they prayed that the one they loved might be spared. They weren’t used to praying but there was so much to lose that their prayers were pleading enough.

"When they had prayed they looked up, to find a man standing in front of them. Neither one has since been able to describe him. He seemed to belong to the woods, as if they were

his home. They believed what he said as one believes the sailor at sea, or the farmer in the field, or the forester in the woods.

"This is what he said.

"'God has heard your prayers.'

"They wanted to embrace him in their joy and thankfulness, but something in his eye stopped them, making them feel doubtful.

"'You have prayed too late,' he said. 'Death has already taken them.'

"They bowed their heads in anguish.

"'God has heard your prayers,' said the man again. They looked up but couldn't understand him. 'God is almighty,' he said, 'and he will answer your prayers. You can't get back that which death has taken, but you can keep the ones you love. God will let you choose. Death must claim its own—but you can keep yours. If you choose to let death take the young women's bodies, they shall live in your souls, so that there shall be no distance between you. They shall live in your thoughts, so you won't know whether it is you or they who is thinking. You will go through this world so united that you will not know which of you is really dead.

"'On the other hand, you can choose recovery of the body—death shall give it up, and she shall be as she was when you first knew you loved her and she gave you her answer. But you will never grow any nearer to one another. There will be no growth of love. Death claims that if it gives up her body—Now you must choose.'

"I have told you the two young men were both good. Neither one had anything to feel ashamed of, but there was a difference. In one, the everlasting life was half conscious. In the other it was at the stage where one knew it was day and one would have to decide soon. The choice before him woke him entirely, and he said:

“‘I choose the first.’

“The man answered: ‘You are united, the growth of one will be the growth of the other, only twice as strong, because her youth will be added to yours. But when you reach home you will find her cold and dead.’

“Hearing this the other young man hid his face in his hands, and cried:

“‘I can’t do it, I must keep her as she was when she said she loved me, I don’t ask more than that.’

“‘She will live,’ said the man, ‘in a few days she will be as well as before.’

“The two young men looked at each other, the one feeling so sorry for the other because they were both good, and friends.

“When they turned to the man he had disappeared. They asked themselves if it were only a dream, and they hurried home.

“They found the one sister dead. At the other’s bedside the doctor was standing, saying:

“‘She will pull through.’

“She did, and they were married and lived a few years in perfect happiness and love, like newly married people usually do. You know how people are. Once in a while an irritated tone, a cross word, or a nasty one said in a thoughtless moment. It means so little, but it is like a stray seed from the devil’s weed basket, that falls onto the lawn. They spread, as habits spread in the human mind. Soon there is a lawn, but not a grass one, only one filled with the devil’s own weeds. You see a discontented line around the husband’s and wife’s mouths, lines left there by all the horrid thoughts and words. You will find it in many houses. Man and wife have lived too close to each other; they have been in each other’s way and

that they need each other makes it worse. They are not young any longer. The infatuation has long ago died a natural death. Only habit keeps them together, a very bad habit. At last the one dies and the other breathes freely again. Before a year has passed everyone can see what a relief it was for the other.

"So it fell out with these two young people. At last she died—a little late, but early enough for him to have a few years left in peace and quiet. There had been so many daily unpleasant scenes between the man and his wife it was unpleasant even to think about her. He managed to suppress these thoughts so thoroughly that he at last forgot her entirely.

"He was then an old, wrinkled man.

"The other one kept his youth. His years were many and his hair turned grey, but there was a light in his eyes like a newly awakened day. To meet him was like meeting the spring.

"One day several years after the death of the wife, the widower met this friend.

"‘Happiness radiates from you,’ he said, ‘it is like a glory around you.’

"‘And it might well do so,’ answered the other. ‘It’s a thing so great. I can’t find room for it in myself.’

"‘What do you consider your greatest luck?’ asked his friend.

"The other answered without after-thought:

"‘That I, through love, became a freed man.’

"The friend stood silent, thinking: ‘Ah, freedom, I only know since my wife’s death, how poor is my happiness, and my life in comparison.’

"He couldn’t bear the sight of his friend’s happiness, so he went away, alone.

"In these two lives you see the difference. The everlasting

life that is unknown and half asleep, and the one that knows that it is day, and decides to wake and get up."

Rasmus got up and walked away.

The children watched him go, and they thought he must surely be one of these two, but which one they couldn't say, his eyes were bright, but his face was very wrinkled.

## Chapter 8

### THE RAIN

**I**T was at the time when it began to be amusing to be naughty.

It brought many doubts into the world, but at the same time, much excitement. Things took on new faces, but of no permanency as yet. The old ones would suddenly pop up, to disappear quickly again. One had to try and attain the wisdom of the great minds and be like them, for it was clear that the great minds saw the world with the same eyes. The other world was about to disappear from Hans also. He was growing. Miracles still seemed to happen but he was not sure. God didn't come and talk to him any more. He couldn't climb up the sunbeams any longer, and you couldn't get anything by giving away. The sun-heaven was only a dream.

The miracles that happened now were rather mysterious. He didn't think one ought to believe in them. There was the rain miracle; he believed it might be half true and half imagination. It happened under Peder "Quiet's" half a roof.

Peder's name wasn't Quiet, but he was called that, and was quiet. When Hans was very small he thought that Peder had acquired the name because his voice wasn't in himself but in the one he was talking to. One noticed it more than one actually heard it. Then one day something happened. Now he was old enough to know that Peder was called Quiet because he spoke quietly and gently.

"Go over to Peder and say he can have Niels Hansen to help him in the morning," said his father. Niels Hansen was helping him with the hay that day.

Hans started off. It was the time for carting the hay. People were sweating in their shirt sleeves in the fields. He was sorry he wasn't in his shirt sleeves, but still he was sweating just the same, and even if he wasn't working in the fields, he was going on an errand about the work.

In the distance on the very edge of the horizon lay a great, grey, woolly-looking cloud, like the scarf Stine "Weaver" always had around her mouth, because she couldn't stand any air, at least, not fresh air, on her chest. He walked along wondering about it, wondered if she still used the same air over and over again. "It must," he thought, "be like a bedroom in the morning, before the windows were opened." It wasn't a bit queer that she coughed so much.

When he looked up again the woolly scarf cloud had half covered the sky's face.

"Its face looks very upset," he thought—"and so do all the faces in the field—for fear it will begin to rain before they have finished bringing in the hay."

He knew the sound: wet clothes, prickles that irritated, bits that tickled, furious oaths at the weather, cross words to one another, kicks to horses and dogs.

He ran. The woolly cloud had covered the sky like a thick grey hood. No sooner had he started to run than it began to pour. Soaked through, he reached Peder Quiet's yard and ran in under the half-roof of the tool shed.

Under there stood Peder looking at the weather. He was so busy watching that he didn't say "Good-day." Perhaps he was so cross he didn't feel like greeting anyone. But Hans had such a good message for him, it ought to make him feel better.

He stopped just as he was about to give the message, and thought better of it. Peder was not to be made to feel better. Just the opposite, if anything. In a little while Peder would get

really angry and then Hans would know and to-night he would tell his friend Niels, and they would have great fun.

Besides the ordinary swear words used by all the people, most of the villagers there had their own special oaths that were quite personal and belonged to their special farm and its people, which no other person ever used, unless they were quoting that farmer. These oaths were a part of its owner's body and soul, but nothing is holy to a school boy! During their play-time they would repeat each farmer's private oaths, and on their way home from school, would stop in front of each farm house, and swear the farmer's oaths in chorus. That was a wonderful game.

Outside Peder Quiet's farm, they had to keep quiet because they didn't know any of Peder's oaths. They found out that no one had ever heard him swear.

But now it was pouring and ruining Peder's hay, and his farm help stood around doing nothing, and had to be paid a full day's wages. If he would only open his mouth, surely the oaths would come pouring out.

Then Hans and Niels would sneak over this evening swearing Peder's oaths at his own door, and have a good laugh over it.

Hans sat on the milk cart speculating. It would be better if Peder forgot about him, because he felt certain that Peder only swore when alone.

Peder didn't move, so Hans decided to help him a bit.

"It's too bad for the hay, all this rain," he said slyly, adopting an elderly wise tone. At the moment he was glad about the rain, for it would help him catch Peder out.

Peder jumped; he tore his thoughts away from the rain and answered: "Ye-es, we could have done with a bit more dry weather."

"It looks as if his mind were crawling into the rain," thought Hans, "to see if he could find a dry spot."

Hans sat thinking about it. The dripping from the moss-covered roof ran down the yard; rain filled the whole sky, its monotonous sound was lulling him to sleep, it had already been telling him stories without any connection. Then it turned to music, and at last—and with that he was wide awake—he heard Peder Quiet's voice from the yard, quiet, a little monotonous and a trifle damp; Hans looked up surprised; he hadn't heard Peder go out into the rain.

Peder hadn't, he still stood under the roof—but his voice came out of the rain, it seemed to hang in it, Hans felt he could almost see it out there!

"It may not keep on raining."

There was a light in Peder's face—as though he was thinking about something pleasant that made him smile. The light was living and went in and out of Peder—like a smile comes out of one person's face and goes into the face of the person he's talking to, and makes him smile back. Hans saw that it began to grow lighter out in the rain. Something was going on between Peder and the rain, just as it would between two people standing looking at each other, both knowing about the same thing, but not mentioning it to anyone. Something very secret was happening between Peder and the rain and now Hans could plainly see what it was. It was Peder's soul that slipped out into the rain. It had shaken itself and coughed a large amount of drops as thick and heavy as tear drops, as you do when you swallow something the wrong way. In this way it had become lighter and free, and now there was nothing to keep it back—and in that moment Peder's soul went out of the yard with the rain. Behind it strayed Peder's body, like an old horse that is pulled by a rope out of the stable. Over by the gate he stood, looking far away. High up in the

sky from all sides was a clear light, coming down around Peder; it entered into him, and shone out of his face in a large smile. His soul had come back again from a blue sky, and the sun met Peder Quiet's face.

Peder turned around to Hans and said:

"See, the rain went away."

He said it in the quiet, satisfied voice one uses when talking about work that is finished satisfactorily.

Hans went quietly away to tell Niels about the miracle. When he met his friend he could only tell the experience in these words:

"I have seen Peder Quiet's oath."

"Seen it?"

"Yes—you can't hear it. But I saw him say it to the rain, and the rain went out of his yard and over by the gate. Peder said it again, far away, and the rain left the village. What he said you could only see, you couldn't hear it."

"I imagine Peder Quiet's oath is a secret," said Niels.

"Did you give Peder the message?" asked his father, when Hans came home.

"Well—no—I was sheltering under the shed, and when I was going to give it—the rain had stopped—I mean, the rain had—Peder had gone."

"Oh, you'll have to run over again," said his father.

## Chapter 9

### THE FLOWERS THAT COULDN'T BE PLUCKED

HANS came out of the yard with his satchel on his back, and stood waiting for Trine. A man walking by asked: "Do you like going to school?"

The boy answered brightly: "Yes."

The man might have stopped and asked: "Are you sure you're not telling a lie?" The boy would have blushed and answered very embarrassed and perhaps honestly: "Yes."

The man could also have asked:

"Do you really like it?"

Then the boy would, brightly and honestly, have answered: "Yes."

The man meant nothing more by his question than "Good morning." Conscience and honesty were allowed to turn over and sleep on contentedly.

Further down the road stood another boy, waiting for Hans and Trine.

"Do you like going to school?" the man asked, and the boy answered without hesitation:

"No!"

The man stopped and pointing back up the road said:

"The boy back there said 'Yes.' Why do you suppose he likes it?"

"I suppose it is because he always knows his lessons. It's easy enough to like it if you can answer all the questions that the others can't. He's never asleep when asked a question. On the playground he's fed up and goes around thinking his own thoughts. He's hardly ever with us when we play."

"Is that really so?" asked the man.

"Yes," answered the boy. Because it was true. He ought to know. It was at the same time—a lie—which he didn't know.

Hans hated his school hours, though he sat there brightly and dutifully. It was, as it should be. Everytime one of the pupils couldn't give a right answer, a nod from the teacher in Hans' direction, and the right answer was given. The teacher expected it. His comrades expected it. The whole village expected it. If he were once to let them down, every one would talk about it. "To-day Hans didn't know his lessons."

He walked to school, went in and sat down, with all his knowledge stacked up around him like ammunition ready to let loose when the teacher nodded: "Fire!"

It didn't amuse him in the least; it bored him, not because it was difficult for him, for he learned as easily as he played. He felt he wasn't with his friends in their play; at least not in their way. He didn't belong, when he was always held up as an example, triumphant over them. He was with them, in another way, when playtime came.

The boys saw to it that he wasn't playing with them. It usually happened this way. And it was the same to-day; but he was more than "with them."

They rushed out of the school door into the playground, shouting and screaming to one another, and their wooden shoes clattering. It was wonderful, no one knew who called or what they called, for it all merged into a big, joyous noise. In this noise was Hans' whole heart.

Then it would happen, this great noise would echo so in his mind and heart, that his mouth became silent; he couldn't call out from sheer joy. His legs stopped running, because he felt as if he were in all the other little legs that ran; he felt them as he did his own.

In that way, he was more "with them," than they knew, but it made him just stand still and watch.

Niels came over to him, and asked:

"What are you standing there thinking about?"

Hans was so full of this intense, peculiar joy that he felt like talking to some one about his thoughts.

"Don't you think it's a wonder, our all being alive?" he asked.

Niels looked at him dumbfounded.

"I think it would be more of a wonder if any of us were dead," he answered, rushing off to his game again.

Hans looked after him, disappointed.

Naturally Niels was right—in a way. But still it is a wonder that we are alive—in another way.

Hans began walking along the road. The games and noise disturbed that wonder feeling, and he didn't want them to. He felt as if he might find out something if he stood quiet in this wonder and asked questions into the air—inside yourself, of course.

He happened to lift his head, and noticed the gable of a house.

It looked peculiar; he almost believed it was thinking about something. But it was only his own thoughts.

"There it stands, and now the job is finished." He could see it all, the walls that made the foundation, rising into the air, the wreath put on the roof, and he said: "Now the house is finished."

A house—Here it was, a new-born house, that suddenly stood by the road, and didn't realise that the spot on which it stood had once been quite bare! A house! He loved houses, suddenly. He looked at it more closely and his mouth opened in surprise.

It was the school!

He knew it well enough—It was a house—one that was used for a school.—If one put the school somewhere else it would be an ordinary house again—There would be a “schooly” atmosphere about it, for a long time.

He looked at the date of the building. It was a long time ago, perhaps old Godtfred, who died the other day, had helped to build it. Some people had called him Godtfred “Bricklayer.” That had been his job in life. First he was just called Godtfred, then he was called Godtfred “Bricklayer,” and when he couldn’t work any longer, he was called “Old Godtfred,” with something “bricklaying” about him. When he died they just said: “Godtfred is dead.” Now he was in heaven, he was just Godtfred, not old, nor bricklayer. What was Godtfred—the Godtfred who was in heaven?—

What was he, himself?—A schoolboy. Later he could become . . . farmer, smith, miller, or a bricklayer like Godtfred. But before he started at school? Before he was of any use?—There was something that was him, Hans—without school, miller, smith, or bricklayer.—He could feel it in himself—He stood still in this feeling, because it was good. It became plainer and better the longer he stood in this feeling.

Suddenly he thought:

“Now I know what it is in us that becomes heavenly! It’s that which can’t be used for anything else—because it is already heavenly, while we are alive—if we feel it.”

The sexton sat in the window smoking his pipe.

“Have you managed to figure out how many bricks there are in the wall?” he asked.

“No,” answered Hans turning his back to the man.

On the edge of the road grew wild flowers, cateyes, bluebells and whitlow grass.

Whitlow grass! What is whitlow grass? It’s whitlow grass! It can’t be baked and made into food. It is just—blessed.

"Yes, they are beautiful, those flowers!"

It was the Countess herself, who spoke.

The sexton coughed very hard. Hans in his surprise forgot to take off his cap.

"They are beautiful," she repeated.

Hans stared at her.

What did she mean by such prattle? She was a fine Countess, and owned the castle and whole garden with all its fine roses, tulips and lilies and—everything. The gardener picked flowers for the vases every day.

Whitlow grass!

A hand plucked the flowers, and a familiar voice said:

"If you please."

"Thank you," said the Countess, "you are a very polite boy."

It was Niels who had saved the honour of the school. School began, the teacher's face looked cross and troubled. The favourite pupil had behaved stupidly. At last it came out:

"Why didn't you pluck the flowers for the Countess?"

Yes, it sounds funny, but Hans told honestly why he hadn't.

"I didn't know they could be plucked."

A roar of laughter came from the others. The favourite could have a One for stupidity to-day.

"What did you say?" cried the teacher, "didn't know they could be plucked?"

"No."

A new roar of laughter. The teacher grew red in the face.

"Are you lying?"

A terrified, "No!"

"Oh, so you are just stubborn."

The cane was brought out.

"Do you admit that you lied?"

"No."

The cane came down hard, many times.

"Were you lying?"

A "No," was sobbed out in tears of wretchedness.

"Well, we shall see who can hold out the longest." The cane came down again. At that moment one of the girls broke into tears. It was Trine. The teacher looked at her, threw the cane aside and said:

"After this you shall be called 'Liar-Hans.'"

On the way home he walked by himself. The others walked at a little distance, they could not help respecting him for sticking to the lie, but they thought the lie very stupid.

He was alone, the world was without life. He was called "Liar-Hans" and that hurt more than the thrashing; he had never really told a lie consciously.

He couldn't understand what had happened. Of course he knew that flowers could be plucked. But one thing was certain. He had not told a lie; it seemed to him the teacher ought to understand that he knew flowers could be plucked and would never tell such a stupid lie—and that he, in this case, had told the truth.

Some one came up to him. It was Niels.

"I'm sorry I picked those flowers for her," he said.

Hans looked up at him; he said nothing, but their eyes met a moment. Niels walked away without a word.

Out of that moment grew a friendship that lasted a lifetime. It also protected Hans from the name "Liar-Hans." One day one of the boys used the name while they were playing. Niels stepped in front of him, saying furiously:

"Don't do that again."

Niels' shoulders were broad and his arms muscular. It was enough. The hurt remained with Hans the rest of the day.

He never talked to Trine who had stopped the punishment by her tears. He thought she was disgusted with him, and she had cried because she realised he was a liar.

Not until they were going to the parson to prepare for their confirmation, did they grow close together again.

They had to walk together alone, the last bit of the road home. After a long depressing silence, he said:

"I know very well you think I'm a liar."

"I have never thought that," she answered.

"That day—about the Countess and the flowers?" he asked.

"I didn't think you were lying," she answered, "I didn't understand you, because there was no sense in it. But I knew very well when you said it, you must have forgotten they could be plucked—I knew you never lied."

"Why did you cry then?"

"Because he hit you so hard."

The scene was so vivid, her eyes filled with tears again. He took her hand, pressing it, but he turned his face away. He was too big to cry over things like that.

But it was so good to be "we" again.

As "we" one never grows up. "We" have no age, "we" can always cry with sorrow and laugh with happiness.

## Chapter 10

### GROWING UP

THERE comes a time when there is no longer an intimate circle which gathers on the playground. There is a vague something in some of the faces which separates them from the others. Something which would make you examine the down on their faces more intently, if the girls didn't have it as well. It is easy to see, but difficult to grasp. It peeps out of the eyes like a starling out of its cage. It lies in the smile, like the first sign of ripeness in a berry.

It is fate. They are soon leaving school and in a short while they will be confirmed. They will no longer walk in a flock home, or to school. Each will go his own way, out into life and to all that is to happen. This part of whatever is to happen, lies beyond, waiting for them. Their fate hangs over them. At present it only means them well. It is sitting there waiting, in their fresh bodies, feeding itself on their young blood. It hangs a glad, brave smile out through the windows of their eyes like a flag.

Although every fate has its own smile, they all look alike at that age.

Only one looks different from the others—Karna, the prettiest girl in the school. But she is not the admitted beauty. Against all rules and regulations of beauty, Trine is considered the most beautiful, with her classic features and fine free carriage.

Of course Karna is pretty, we can all see that, but Trine is beautiful. That's something we are sure of, we know it. You can see it.

Fate has had rather a hard struggle with the smile on Karna's face; it will not behave. If the others are like a quiet, sunny beach, Karna's is like the rollicking waves where sunlight and shadow chase each other, while the colours are constantly changing——

They are leaving the school yard, for the last time. Over there near the playground, lies the cemetery, but it won't concern them for many, many years. There is no end to the life that lies in front of them, waiting.

The ways part. Some stay at home on the farm, others go away to earn their living. Trine takes a position on Niels' farm.

It lies quite a distance from Hans' house. They are not neighbours any longer. The last field of the one farm borders on to the other, so they might chance to meet while working.— But they don't meet.

A year goes by, and they don't meet. Then comes a Sunday, when they are both drawn to church. They meet outside and say, "Good-day," and have so much to talk about, neither one can begin. There is not much time, but Hans is determined to see Trine home.

Suddenly his mind becomes clear and he discovers fate is master over Trine's hair, and has grown it in the softest lines about her face, and given it a shine that makes him half close his eyes. As he closes them he feels paralysed, first by a great joy and then a pain, then paralysed.

This hair he had known so well in the old days and he had dared to pull it, if he wished, but that never entered his mind now.

Now it is alive with a strength that makes his fingers tingle. The hair wants to be touched, it is made to be played with—but the person who dares must be very brave, because it belongs to Trine, and she looks very grown up. That curl there,

the one that would never stay in place by combing; it is the same one that always got in his way when they looked at pictures together! He forgives it quickly. Nothing in the world is as certain as his forgiving it, the old irritation it used to cause by tickling him. He even thanks it. But the curl waves about in the wind, quite indifferent.

Yes, he would dare to touch that one—if she hadn't been there herself. When, on the way home, they got talking like the old days, he would touch it.

He walked into the church without having said any more than, "Good-day," while there he made up a hundred things he would say to her on the way home—. Suddenly the Parson said, "Amen."

When Hans came out, she was standing by the door, looking thoughtlessly about. Any one could see she was really waiting for some one. Hans stepped forward quickly.

The devil had been in church that morning, for he suddenly whispered in Hans' ear: "Are you going to make a fool of yourself and let everyone see you thought she was waiting for you?"

He listened. His face was thoughtful and he threw his shoulders out, and as he passed her by, politely held his hand in front of his mouth, to cover a yawn—which he couldn't manage.

Then came the pain of repentance, which relieved itself in an unnaturally tender handshake with Mads, who was standing by the gate.

He hangs on to Mads, so Trine will have time to catch up to them. She shall have her chance. He looks back to see if she is coming.

Yes, she is coming—with Niels, who is talking and laughing, while she smiles quietly.

If Hans had had as much power as feeling, the world would have come to an end that day.

But he hadn't, and it stayed. He felt so little and weak that the tears came to his eyes.

A while later he felt a pain in his chest. He must be ill and dying, because his thoughts would dwell on his own funeral. He could see the coffin lowered into the grave. Trine was there, and broke into violent sobs when the coffin disappeared.

Hay time came, and these two found themselves working field to field. It was about evening, and the last load was on the cart. Hans walked over to the fence to say something pleasant to Trine and Niels. Niels was just helping Trine up on the load; she flew up in a quick swing, laughed and called that he needn't use so much strength on her, and Niels answered: "Yes I did, because your hair was tickling me and I had to get you away in a hurry."

They drove off together. That Niels was much stronger than he, he knew. But that that curl should tickle him, almost a stranger, was sacrilege.

Perhaps Niels was not a stranger any longer. When he got home he strained himself, by stubbornly lifting a large stone. He had to go to bed. It was not serious, but next day his father said:

"You are not strong enough for farm work, but you have good brains."

Yes, well, —. He would get away from all of it. That would suit him very well. He would become learned, pale, and celebrated. Lonesome but envied, admired but unhappy—as one would find out by the manuscript he would leave.—

In the autumn he is to enter college. Now he is just allowed to prepare himself for his very difficult examination. It will mean hard work. He has only had the country school training.

Twice he met Trine. The first time on a Sunday. He walked with her and Niels to church. He said nothing. Niels talked and was lively. Trine wanted to draw him into the conversation, although he supposed it was just for politeness' sake—because she said:

“You are going to study, no?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered.

“You will get away from all of us here,” she tried, and he thought he heard a slight sigh in her voice, but he was not sure, so he made his voice hard and answered drily:

“I suppose I shall.”

During the sermon he repented and promised to be good on the way home. What the parson had said, he hadn't the slightest idea, but he presumed he must have gone through the sermon twice, as it took such a time before he said “Amen.”

Trine walked home with several girls. Hans went alone with Niels, who seemed very happy and wanted to go to high school. What he wanted to go off to high school for when Trine was working on their farm, was impossible for Hans to understand——

August came, and Hans had to go. He was to live in the big city.

One Saturday afternoon he went on a farewell walk. Out over the field he walked, past the school. He wanted to go up to it, look through the windows and remember everything. He went in over the cemetery and in between the graves. Some of them had crosses with the date of birth and death carved on them. Here lay a whole village buried. A living one walked over the dead, every Sunday—some day they would lie here themselves, and a new village would walk over them. He almost wished it had already happened.

What was life, compared with death—a little pause shorter than the few minutes' recreation at school.

And when it was finished—no pain in the heart, no sorrow in the mind.

Trine stood suddenly before him. She popped up, on the other side of some bushes. She had been decorating a grave. She smiled and blushed—although there was no one there but himself.

He didn't remember that a moment before, he had been wishing himself dead. He never even thought of such a possibility. It was a lie that anybody ever died. He stood right in the middle of throbbing life and his happiness was unconquerable. It dwelt in him like the sun—sun entirely. Trine could see it, she said:

"You look like a spot of sun, one of those where the sun oranges had fallen."

It wasn't necessary or possible to answer anything to that. They walked off together. The road seemed endless, and yet short as a step. Suddenly there was a gate, a gate belonging to a farmer. On the farm worked Trine. A world appeared around them. A world with work, houses, home, and words that one says to another. Trine gasped without knowing, these words, and said,

"So you are going to study for the Church?"

"I suppose I am," answered fate and he. Both his fate and her own smiled out of his eyes and crept into hers.

He wasn't envious of Niels or his strength—granted—Niels could swing her up on the hay-load, but he could swing her into a vicarage—which was a much higher position.

He was absolutely certain that now they were engaged.

## Chapter 11

### NAUSICAA

AS “the new boy” he entered the Latin school. “Welcome to the slave barracks,” said one of the old students, and a slave barracks it was, coming from a country school. He had brought with him the dogma that he should be top of the class. This responsibility he had brought with him. He had a long way to go before he could even come up to the same grade as the poorest in the Latin school. He understood only a little of the work, which was quite ordinary for the others—On the other hand no one could memorise as easily as he.

So he memorised. He learned English, German, French, Latin, Greek—and another queer abstract language, which they all seemed to fail in—Danish.

Danish was no longer his native language. The language he talks to his comrades in. No, “Danish” is a subject, a language that one must learn in order to understand the others. Danish is the answer on the other side of the equality sign.

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{Spes} \\ \epsilon\lambda\pi\acute{\iota}\varsigma \\ \text{Haab} \\ \text{Espoir} \\ \text{Hoffnung} \end{array} \right\} = \text{Hope. [Haab]}$$

Then  $\text{Spes} = \epsilon\lambda\pi\acute{\iota}\varsigma = \text{Haab} = \text{Espoir} = \text{Hoffnung} = \text{Hope}.$

It's like in Mathematics:  $(A + B)^2 = A^2 + 2A B + B^2$  usu-

ally, unless A or B mean something definite. He knows his synthetic rules, he can analyse the meaning of a foreign sentence, as well as he can prove a mathematical problem. But they are without substance. That is to say, they have character substance. *De bello gallico* = UG.\*

Now turn Xenophon's *Anabasis* again into = *de bello gallico*, and thereafter again, the same as any other problems, and have it give the same sum: UG.

Farewell, said the world, and went away. The living fields moved far away, like clouds and were lost in the fog. Under his feet were the solid round cobble stones. He always walked looking down at those stones; if he lifted his head, he only saw the stones amongst which one lived. The world seemed crowded with stones and letters. Once in awhile, if he was very tired they merged together, so he thought. "Stones = letters." All words are formed for speech, and just as pale and abstract, entirely distilled away from the thing itself. There is one word which is horrible, which is neither dead nor alive, it is mouldy: "instructor."

He meets its concrete importance daily in different editions, but they are without life, only masks. They are never called by their right names—only by nickname.

There is the grammar, for example—the Greek instructors have made the possibilities of UG more difficult than ever, by coming with a whole new set of letters.

The teacher is tall, narrow-shouldered, stupid and stern, but can suddenly be beautiful. His eyes have a far away look, but come suddenly back at the least mistake in the lessons. He is not satisfied with your looking up the words in the dictionary; you are to keep a lesson book and write them in there. "May I see your lesson book?" he would say when there was any doubt about a word. Then he would hear them in their words.

\* An university grade or standard (= optime).

It made no difference to Hans if he was asked in Danish or in Greek. He is just as certain on one hand as the other. There are quite a few dead UG's in the book of records, to his credit.

One day, one suddenly came to life. The miracle occurred when Nausicaa came down to the strand to play ball with her handmaidens.

“Forth from her snowy hand Nausicaa threw  
the various ball; The ball erroneous flew  
and swam the stream; Loud shrieks the virgin train,  
and loud shrieks redoubles from the main  
Waked by the thrilling sound, Ulysses rose——”

together with the student Hans Larsen:

Before he knew what had happened he was sitting amongst the Phæacian men listening to Ulysses' story, Nausicaa having gone to her quarters with her handmaidens. At last her words, like her ball, “erroneous flew” and hit, not Ulysses, but himself.

“Oh heaven! in my connubial hour decree  
This man my spouse, or such a spouse as he!”

The ages were exchanged. The school walls crumbled away. The Phæacian city arises. No, it has not arrived yet, it sleeps in its unborn state, like love in a virgin breast. One day it springs forth, and is. Holding in itself, the past, and future, all.

His name flies around in the air, like some homeless young bird, it cannot reach the heights where his soul now dwells, it returns to the “lesson book,” is just a poor word which has been thrown out from itself, a word which it is no use to cry out, but a word which one can give a bad mark for inattention. This often happens.

He laughs when it reaches his consciousness, this mark for inattention. He laughs up there, where thousands of years

blink to each other: What is a "lesson" in a "school,"—what is a "school." It can crumble away into dust. Oh, "Lesson book," you comical, bespectacled creature, with your marks for inattention during lessons—One day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day.

Through this "mark's" humbling gateway, he goes laughing into life. Greek is no longer a mere lesson. It is Nausicaa's language. How wonderful to learn.

Ulysses' words to her are reborn in his own mind.

"My life, thy gift I boast!"

They come to him as a revelation. They create a superstitious tension in him. The words take on a magic strength. The one that has the translation of this bit, in the oral examination—the one that gets the lucky chance—

His future becomes beautiful as Nausicaa, great amongst men, as Ulysses. His entire ego is gathered into one wish and hope. Nay, more than that: in prayer: He prays that it will be given him to say these magic words.

Now he is sitting, excited, waiting to hear his name fly out from the teacher's mouth. He has a feeling he can will it to come. It happens! It comes—the opening is near: Nausicaa and her good fairies are with him. He begins to read:

"Hail! God-like stranger! And when heaven restores  
To thy fond wish thy long-expected shores,  
This ever grateful in remembrance bear,  
To me thou ow'st, to me, the vital air!"

He is so moved he must stop and clear his throat. Now the dreadful thing happens. A strange voice continues. It is the teacher, standing by the window talking aloud to himself, meaninglessly beautiful, unutterably clumsy, foolish as an old man, who loves truly and deeply.

"O royal maid,  
Whose worth the splendours of thy race adorns,  
So may dread Jove (whose arm in vengeance forms  
The written bolt, and blackened heaven with storms)  
Restore me safe, through weary wanderings toss'd,  
To my dear country's ever pleasing coast——"

The voice came like a wave, that bursts, and spreads itself among the pebbles on the strand. He had to wait till his breath gave new life to his voice:

"As, while the spirit in this bosom glows,  
To thee, my goddess, I address my vows."

A younger voice cut him off, Hans wrenches from him the last line.

"My life, thy gift I boast!"

Old "Lesson book" starts, wakes up to the fact that he is teacher, and having a "Greek hour." Walks over to his desk, looks at Hans who should carry on. Both teacher and pupil bow their heads, blushing deeply.

Poor worn out "Lesson book." He has stood there in *puris naturalibus*, naked unto his very inmost shy soul, while a roomful of inquisitive students have gaped in through the window. One of them has understood for himself. He doesn't want to hear the boy's voice again. The next lesson hour is at hand.

During their fifteen minutes break, they stormed the register, to see why Hans' recitation was stopped. Has he received no mark for it? If not, why? Beside his name is marked "UG" differently from any other. It is written in a careful, fine handwriting as if Nausicaa herself had written it.

The magic had worked. The "Lesson book" is old and worn out, and is called Pedersen. The gate has closed on his

future a long time ago. But he is one of the chosen, one of the initiated.

It was an initiation into love, and there was Eros, almighty Eros, the winner of all wars; he came to serve. First he fell in love with Nausicaa's language, because it was hers, and so in the end, because she had lived. He craved all; the lessons had to give themselves to him body and soul, the grammar as well as the living contents.

He had survived the history in its ordinary sense, once it lay in the actions and undivided from them. Another time it was distilled into words that were filled with magic and became a force.

It must have been the old dogma that he should be top of the class which saved him from becoming a lazy poet. His Eros merged into close contact with his work. He became thin and pale. One of his comrades was just as pale, but not from studying. But the reason was deeply rooted, the same. Only the result was different.

He was transformed from a cocoon into a butterfly, from a farmer lout whom one tolerated, into the class's worshipped leader. One came to him, as if one came to Caesar to ask for help. He gave his gifts generously to all, and sunned himself in his comrades' admiration, without making himself notably important. That he was a leader was not from any feeling of pompous importance, but because he was born to it.

The "Lesson book" would sometimes stand in a corner of the school yard, watching Hans, and suddenly look meaninglessly beautiful, only to look afterwards twice as round-shouldered and knock-kneed as possible.

One day they met on the street. The "Lesson book" took Hans home with him. What a collection of books on Athens and Rome! How they lived in Nausicaa's old neglected lover!

He was married to a parlour maid. He looked at her always with such tired, but friendly eyes.

He had five children at school and with pedagogical eyes, and eyes that showed his sense of duty to them, he looked at them. He was very lonely. At Hans he looked with a younger man's eyes.

"Isn't it awful to have to dig up verse as lessons for us, over there in school?" asked Hans.

The "Lesson book" looked down at the table, got up, stroked Hans' head, and walked back and forth a while before he said:

"Once in a while, there comes to me, over there, that——"

"Have you never been in Athens and Rome yourself?" asked Hans.

The "Lesson book" sat down heavily with a far away look, but didn't answer.

Very quietly Hans whispered:

"Forgive me!"

The "Lesson book" shook his head quietly and answered:

"I have had my hopes and dreams, but I have a family, and the family must live."

Silence laid itself about them, and they sat far apart and opposite each other, but still in contact, as two children on a see-saw. The deeper the one sank down into the grey earth filled with duties, the higher the other soared towards a brilliant future and a clear sky. At last the "Lesson book" said:

"Let me be a discouraging example for you, then I shall feel I have been of some use. Keep your future open. Don't let yourself be chained; because you were born with wings to fly."

He was silent again. Slowly his face changed expression, it wasn't that meaningless, uncertain beauty that flooded him. It was something richer, deeper that revealed itself, a peculiar

charm. It was the "Lesson book" himself, the human being who had met his life, and taken it up, and now gathered it together in one sentence, while he pointed at his books:

"With these I live, and with these I teach—and I live in them so much that my pupils call me the 'Lesson book.'" He smiled understandingly.

"I will never do it again," murmured Hans.

"No, now you know that I know."

"Not because of that," answered Hans.

The "Lesson book" smiled again.

When the holidays came, Hans had to go home to the country. It bored him. People there began to be strangers to him; they were no longer people, they were peasants.

"Here we lie, just the same," said the fields, but his thoughts were far away from them, in the future. He was longing to get back to the city; there was no life here.

Rasmus Snak used to stand watching him, but Hans avoided him. Rasmus has gone to the dogs; it's worse with him than with the "Lesson book" who lives his lonely life amongst the classics, when lessons are over.

Finally came the last year of college. He had worked so well through the other years that he could take it fairly easily now. "Of course we expect you to distinguish yourself," said the principal. He felt certain that Hans would do this. Hans had already made a name for himself in the city. Parents in the country watched the progress of this young man in the city, with whom their sons could not compete. The boys admired him without envy. Hans enjoyed it happily and naturally as one enjoys a summer's day. He had, in fact, everything he wanted.

Also a living Nausicaa! She passed the school, one day. The sheriff and mayor of the town's lovely daughter, Ellen Buchwald. He was standing by the fence when he saw her; when

their eyes met, he knew at once how Nausicaa really looked—and forgot her at once.

In Ellen Buchwald's young body, his golden future was symbolized. His glance told her this every time they met on the street. She noticed it and approved of it. He knew this, as all young people know, long before words are spoken.

To talk to her was impossible; he did not attend "Alkinoo's Court"; he didn't know the Mayor Buchwald.

But it would come after a brilliant examination. The world was glitter raining down on him. He stood in the middle of the golden rain and glitter. What is more, it was "spiritual" glitter.

One day there arrived a competing glitter in polished buttons, long shining sabre, blue jacket and trousers with long red stripes. Encased in this was a well-formed body which answered to the name Second Lieutenant Mariager of the Odense Dragoons. He lived at the Mayor's and promenaded with Ellen who was envied by all the girls, because soldiers rarely came to the city.

It would take a good deal of spiritual glitter to outshine this competitor, if indeed it were at all possible.

Hans was transformed from a glad and happy "Aladdin" to a secretive "Noureddin." To distinguish himself was not enough. He had to do something that no one could do after him. He read unnecessary verse. That was Ellen's fault. The small, secretive smiles she used to give him still came when he saw her, but such smiles were not so marked as before. The polished buttons came regularly to town. They had to be outshone. He memorised like mad; he nearly went mad by constantly taking extra work in all his subjects. Even in the Lord's prayer one can make a mistake, but this must not happen in any of his subjects. He managed to read life out of all his books and in exchange he could answer all questions perfectly,

even in his sleep. His finish at the school was like his entrance. He saw everything through a fog of letters.

The phenomenal happened. He was almost an idiot when examination time came. He passed perfect in every subject and got "UG" in every one. It had never happened in the history of the city before. His picture was in the papers with his biography. The principal gave a long talk about him, and called him a "genius." This was also in the papers.

He was invited to dinner at the Mayor's whose son was up for examination next year. He sat next to Ellen at table. The Mayor gave a speech for the "genius." When the coffee was served he asked Hans if he could picture his future. Hans answered, "Yes, on the map. Copenhagen—Rome—Athens—Copenhagen."

"Ah! for scholarship your name will bring honour to your country," said the Mayor.

Hans smiled. Ellen's eyes were sparkling. Lieutenant Maria-ger stood in the corner pulling his moustache.

When leaving, he looked brazenly into Ellen's eyes, and pressed her hand, questioningly. She lowered her eyes but answered the pressure slightly.

Hans was happy. He now knew the Mayor, and could call during the holidays.

His happiness would have been complete if he had not been suffering from insomnia. Even a new happiness loses its brightness when it's turned over and over again, while one is waiting, tired, in front of sleep's gate. If one could only forget a moment and slip quietly in. If it happened he did sleep, he dreamed he couldn't sleep, and it bothered him so much that it woke him up.

His eyes became tired and heavy—not worth showing Ellen. He was happy at the thought of going home to the country. There he would meet all the peasants' admiration, and it was

there he would be free from some irritation, they didn't understand. They were admiring him because he had made a great name for himself.

It was fun for a while. But when he had heard enough of the people say, "Yes, we have the paper with your picture in it," and have it pulled out for God knows how many times, he felt sick. He felt tired of himself and all the other people. To have taken the most distinguished grade in his examination left him cold. In this peculiar state he fell asleep, in a sleep so deep, they thought he would never wake again. Even in the day time he would walk about half asleep.

## Chapter 12

### LETHARGY

EVERYTHING was grey. It was midsummer with blue sky, green grass, yellow corn and red clover. Hidden behind a grey veil which couldn't be lifted, for it was heavy and needed clearing away, sat Hans. Once in a while he would wander about behind the grey veil and try to let his mind clear it away.

"This is the worst fog that ever was," he heard a voice say. It was his own voice. He had been talking aloud to himself. Soon after he fell into a deep sleep, worn out, as after an examination.

At times the fog lifted slightly; something would blink restlessly and disappear. It was his father's eyes. At times the blink seemed larger and intensely close, as if examining him. Those were his mother's eyes. It was a relief when the blinks disappeared into the fog.

"Are you always tired, Hans?" his mother asked one day.

"If only the fog would lift," said Hans, "I would feel better."

"The fog?" she asked, looking out into clear air. "The sun is shining and the sky is blue."

"I'm always in a fog," he answered—"and I can't understand why it takes so long to wash me clean."

She went to his father and said:

"You must get the doctor; I'm afraid for the boy's mind."

Their eyes met in a frightened glance which told of the burden they were carrying and which they never dared to lighten by the use of words.

The doctor came, and said:

"Overworked. A whole year's rest. No trip to Copenhagen to study until he has slept enough. Strengthening food, lots of sleep and plenty of air."

"The others will get ahead of me," complained Hans. "Then what's the use of my record?"

"You have made up the work before," answered his mother, "you can surely do it again."

"At that time I had never tried to get ahead of them," he answered.

"It must be easier to do again, if you have once proved you can do it."

"No, it's more difficult," he sighed, depressed.

Time went on. One day his father came to him and said,

"It's too bad winter has come, you won't be able to sit out any more."

"Winter?" asked Hans—"Well, yes, I suppose it is winter."

"Yes, what else would it be?" asked his father.

"Ah, I only thought that the grey in my head had slowly crept outside," Hans answered.

They fetched the doctor again. This time he examined him thoroughly.

"Is his mind very bad?" asked the mother, anxiously.

"No," said the doctor. "It's only tired, and will grow better if we can cure the other."

"The other?"

"His lungs are bad," answered the doctor.

"What shall we do?" cried his mother.

"Strengthening food, fresh air, and try to awaken his interest in something or other,—it doesn't matter what."

They tried to make him talk about his books.

"You couldn't understand them in any case," he would answer them.

About New Year he read in the papers Ellen Buchwald's engagement to Lieutenant Mariager.

After this, he wouldn't get up from his bed for a whole week. He lay as if he were asleep all day. His mother often came and sat with him but he didn't like it.

"Your eyes are wet," she exclaimed one day. "Are you upset about something?"

"I have been yawning," he answered, "that's why my eyes are watering."

She knew this wasn't true; she had been sitting with him an hour and he had not yawned while she was there.

She went quietly out to her work, but her eyes were wet all day——

March came. "It's soon spring," said his mother. "Then comes summer, and in the autumn you go back to your studies."

"Oh! I don't know," he answered. "I feel as if I don't care about them any longer."

He stood thinking about the "Lesson book" and Rasmus Snak. "What does it lead to," he asked, "either grey fog or sky-blue nonsense?"

"You can become a teacher," she told him.

"That is like the grey fog," he told her.

"Or a parson."

"Sky-blue nonsense."

"It isn't only your physical fitness, but your spiritual fitness I have to worry about," she said, bursting into tears.

He felt very sorry for her, so went regularly to church to please her.

When she saw he never missed a Sunday, and the parson told her he had never had as intelligent a listener as Hans, his mother took fresh courage, and asked Hans one day if he still thought everything the parson said was sky-blue nonsense.

"No," he answered, to please her; to himself he added, "because it isn't sky-blue."

The parson came often and talked to Hans. They sat a long time together. Although the older man did most of the talking he felt he had a very good listener in Hans.

"He is beginning to take an interest in things," said his mother. She went to the parson and thanked him.

Once when the parson was walking out of the yard, Hans stood with a peculiar smile, watching him.

"What are you thinking about?" asked his mother.

His smile broadened, and he answered,

"I'm thinking of Rasmus Snak."

"Yes, poor chap, one must laugh at him, and to think he was ordained for the church. He passed his examinations all right. What is he now? Nothing but an old fool."

"He is sky-blue," answered Hans.

She looked with astonished eyes at him.

"What is the matter with you now?"

"I am tired of it all. I am grey."

## Chapter 13

### AWAKENING

THE rye was long on the stalk as an overgrown schoolboy. One day fate peeped out and it grew grains, and was confirmed, real rye, so that all could see it.

Hans stood near to this rye, which under his very eyes had grown from innocent little green sprouts, to strong stalks with juice in their bodies and grains in their heads. The higher the rye grew the smaller Hans felt. He had a puppy-like feeling that he wanted to play with it. He liked especially to lie on his stomach looking into its forest of stalks—he had so often peeped at it with Trine, before they themselves became full grown rye, on the world's green fields.

One day, while he was lying looking into the rye, his eye caught a stalk he knew. It stood so far away that he couldn't reach it, but there was no mistaking it: a rye stalk exactly like this one he had played with ages ago, long before he began school. There was no difference to be seen between these two. The same intimate affection, and happiness so delicate that he could hardly endure it, came to him now, as then. It came from the rye stalk and entered into him. It was in the rye stalk. How one noticed it in the rye stalk is difficult to say, but it was there—and just as it was in him now—one could notice it in others also.

It seemed to him the rye stalk wanted him for some reason. It made no difference who started it. There sprang up a connection between the stalk and himself. The stalk was so alive. There seemed enough life stored in it to supply a whole universe.

Of course the stalk wanted him—just as he wanted Niels, when he had seen Peder Quiet's "secret oath."

One can't say that a rye stalk knows a secret, but it can very well have a secret. It's silly to be a human when one is with a rye stalk. One can't become a rye stalk, so one must just make the best of it and be together.

Here he threw aside his thoughts and lay looking at the rye stalk, making believe they were exchanging gifts.

He gave the rye stalk his love. What he, in his inmost soul received, it is difficult to say, but on the outside he got a smile, which later on, was often seen on his face, and later remained there constantly, and from what Trine says—lingered there after his death.

A smile of manifold content—disturbingly manifold it seemed at times. Safety, intimate goodness, humour and a silent laughter, that would have seemed frivolous if its growth were not bedded in safety. Ironical, if it hadn't been so intimate, so good and mild. A smile that one could believe was making fun of one if it hadn't been so soothing. Perhaps one could describe it like this. "Just be quiet, my friend, and free from care. Everything is all right—but everything is different from what you had thought. How it is, I will not tell you. The one that tells of this knowledge is committing forgery with words. You can only find it in a knowing being or in the one who is in constant contact with him."—

That day, he didn't know himself he had this smile. He was just lying there with his rye stalk—and through it came in contact with all the other stalks in the field.

Suddenly something strange happened. It looked as if all the rye stalks ran away, hiding themselves in a hurry, and leaving others standing there instead—some that looked like them. He had to laugh, and Karsten Nymand asked:

"Don't you think that's right?"

It brought him back to earth. He realised he had heard Karsten say to Niel's father:

"In a month's time the rye will be full grown," and Niels' father had answered: "Yes, then we can come with the reaping machine."

"Don't you think that's about right?" asked Karsten again. Hans nodded. "Yes, certainly."

But Hans looked disturbed, so Karsten said:

"Yes, you have gone far away from rye fields, and farm life. But we must think about them, and work for them, otherwise they yield nothing."

A memory flashed over Hans' mind; the thrashing because he didn't know the flowers could be plucked.

He turned away and looked at the rye. Naturally, this rye would be ripe in a month, without doubt. It stood there ripening so that it could be cut and brought in.

But the others—those that ran away and hid? Those which he could no longer see, but so vividly remembered. The rye that wasn't to be cut, that had its own life, its own goal, in itself. It was one and the same rye field—and yet it was two, which had nothing in common. One grew in the garden of Paradise and was everlasting. The other stood on earth and was meant for food.

To him they were both real—but he could only see one at a time.

The flowers that couldn't be plucked, and the rye that couldn't be cut, were real. But the flowers Niels picked for the Countess, and the rye Niels' father was going to cut, was also real—and they were the same flowers, and the same rye.

He had a feeling that the person who tried to combine these two realities would burst his brain and go mad. He felt relieved that he could see the rye that was so soon to be cut.

As it was nearly evening, he wandered home. At the bottom

of the hill stood Peder Quiet. He also was looking at his rye. Hans stopped and said, "Good evening."

Peder answered, "Good evening," without looking up from his rye. There was a mild light in his eyes, the light that comes to one's eyes when one looks at something that is good and of which one is fond.

Hans looked at the field. There again stood the rye that couldn't be cut. Peder took one of the heavy heads of grain, caressing it in his hand, and smiled—a really good and understanding smile came on Hans' face as he asked:

"In a way, Peder, it's too bad that this rye has to fall under the machine."

"Yes—what," asked Peder. "The man with the scythe comes to us all sooner or later."

They didn't say anything more about it.

But Peder knew, even if he didn't think about it. The most ordinary people can find room in both worlds without bursting; yes, without even noticing the difference in them.

He wondered if it were not, in just this way, that one was really human. But in that case, he had only seen one really human person,—Peder Quiet!—

When he came home, he surprised his father by asking him about the running of the farm, and his mother thought:

"Now he is waking up; next he will think of his books again."

It didn't work quite so quickly. Every day he hunted for the rye in the Garden of Paradise—and often he found it and stayed with it for hours. The rye was ripening fast, something similar was happening in himself, although he felt sure that he would not become ripe in this rye season. But the rye initiated him to contact hedges and trees that were full of everlasting life.

The nearer he came to these things, the further away he felt

from people. They became enemies. A great dislike for them smouldered in him. He avoided them, as the fox and the hare avoid humans.

Even in his home he felt uncomfortable. His mother's eyes were always watching. She was out to catch him. She laid traps for him—book traps. There was always one of his books lying on the table. He teased her by not even noticing it.

One day the paper with his picture in it, was lying there and something awoke in him. He was ready to show his teeth, as soon as she began to lure him. She noticed this and didn't dare.

In the end it had to be faced.

"People are asking every day when you are going to Copenhagen to continue your studies."

"People?"

"Yes, they expect you to go on distinguishing yourself."

"What business is it of theirs?"

"They are the people from around here," she answered.

When he turned and looked at her, she felt as if he classed her with all the others "from around here," and she cried, saying to her husband,

"It was just as if he threw aside his mother."

Hans was sorry, but it didn't help. He hated people. His mind had suddenly become clear, but it was a bad sort of clearness he had. He saw all their faults and the selfishness in their bodies and faces. It couldn't have been plainer to him if they had hung labels on themselves.

They read each other's labels and acted as if something different were written on them. Deceitful, lying, vulgar, flat and cowardly people.

Up in the quarry was the only pleasant place to be. Round about were the fields, and on them walked the animals and people. They belonged, somehow, like a small part of nature,

like the corn, and grass, and the trees. A man walked across the field with a rake on his shoulder. Who it was he neither cared nor wanted to know; something pleasant had happened. A man walked over the field with a rake on his shoulder. The world was perfect. God could see all he had created, and it was very good. It was impossible not to love the whole world.

The man walked up over the hill. The good continued. The man walked and walked with his rake. It was complete luck that he came nearer. Both the far away and the near was that which God had created.

Suddenly, an indetermination flashed through the figure, as if it were undecided. The man disappeared like the rye that ran away to hide itself in nothing. From out the place where the man had been, came Karsten Nymand's self-satisfied and self-assured person.

Now he no longer walked evenly up over the hill, he made straight for Hans, as if he had an errand.

The smile was so intimate and friendly, there surely must be a goodly portion of malice at the back of it. It had been a hard time for Karsten and Maren, the aristocratic farmers, for when Hans' picture appeared in the papers as having distinguished himself and received such honours for the village; their Kristian had failed in his fourth class exams.

"Are you soon leaving for your studies again?" asked Karsten.

"No, I have finished with my studies!" answered Hans. It was a lie. At the time he neither thought about his studies nor about leaving. But he did not answer Karsten's question, he answered something in Karsten that was lying in there, tense, and that would like to be pleased. It amused Hans to please this thing. Hope flashed across Karsten's face like a crooked mud flounder, down in the flat bottomed harbour.

"Was it too difficult for your head?" he asked, without being able to hide his feelings.

How was it? Love each other! Yes, yes, if we can't do it naturally, one must use a little force.

"I lost the taste for it, just as Kristian did," he said, false honesty in his tone, like Karsten's.

It was the opening for something mean, Karsten understood, but he had to accept the statement and admit:

"Kristian failed."

"He lost interest before the examination, and I lost it after, that's the only difference."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Karsten.

Hans nodded seriously.

Karsten took it all in, turning friendly.

"I hope your chest is better now."

"Yes, thank you," answered Hans. Karsten went, because he didn't want to linger and think too much about consumption and death.

"Be good through your lies," thought Hans, "and they become friendly. I honestly believe he wouldn't mind my getting well, if only I wouldn't study any more."

Good news can't be kept very long. Karsten's wife, Maren came in the afternoon to see and hear with her own ears. She really had to know if all this study had been too hard for his head.

"It looks like it," answered Hans. It amused him intensely to fill them up with lies. This was just like school. He was learning a new language, the people's language, an unreliable, pleasing language.

Maren was so sweet, so sweet, but there was always a thorn in her kisses.

"Kristian says it can't be your head that says 'no'— so it must be your chest, that isn't strong either—Kristian always stands

up for his friends, and you, he has always looked up to you. But what do your parents say to this? They expected so much of you. You were to become known all over the world. What do you want to be if you don't want to study? Sexton? I imagine you might be able to do that."

"I can be a farmer like all the rest of you," Hans said, and saw a neighbourly smile spread over her face like a sun.

"If only you are strong enough for the work. Remember, you strained yourself when you were little."

Ah, she was getting her own back for all the shame and disappointment she had suffered. The many glances, the hidden smiles, when her Kristian had failed, and Erik Larsen's Hans was in the paper. She felt quite recompensed and rather better.

"It's too bad you have strained your head as well. You are your parents' only child. We must pray to our Father in Heaven that he will make you well again.—I have to go home and cook.—Our Kristian is already agent for a farm."

He lay there, watching her go, until she was unrecognisable, not Maren Karstens any longer, only one that walked along the wayside, becoming smaller and smaller and going further and further away. Suddenly he thought:

"I am beginning to understand why God loves people. He only sees them at a great distance!"

He had lived to see the village put on their best clothes for him. When he had arrived home from the city, a prominent personage, they had met him in their best clothes, so "very best" that he longed to see them in their everyday working things. But that was not possible. Now, when they thought he had dropped out and would never amount to anything, had gone and strained himself, they turned the other side to him.

They had given him more than they intended, these funny people: first all they could of honest admiration, then afterwards the sediment mixed up with flattery. Now only the

dregs were left. That bitter-sweet pleasure, that he, when all was said and done, was nothing more nor less than a farmer's son, like their own children—only his health was not so good as theirs, and that made him less capable.

His parents were asked many squeamishly poisonous questions, wrapped up in sweet sympathy. Also himself, but he was amused by it, and soon became an adept at their own language.

His parents, especially his mother, suffered. She didn't dare to talk to him about it. Every time she tried, he would get that peculiar animal look in his eyes, like a dog that is ready to snap, whether you are going to hit it or pet it.

One day one of his confirmation friends, Karl Jensen, came up to the quarry to talk to him. He said people were talking about him and saying that he had studied both his mental and physical faculties to bits. And, "your mother is suffering under it."

"Has she asked you to come here and tell me about it?"

"Yes. People are torturing her with all this talk about you."

"I don't care about people."

"Don't you care about anyone?"

"No."

"No one?"

"Yes—you and Niels."

"No one else?"

"No."

"Niels wants to get married."

"Really?"

"Yes, he's always been fond of Trine."

"Are they engaged?"

Karl looked at him and with a disappointed expression on his face, answered:

"They are together a good deal, but they are not engaged.

Niels would like to be, but Trine is waiting for some one else to come to his senses."

"Who?"

"You."

Hans was silent a moment, then asked:

"Is that why Niels never comes near me?"

"So that's what you think it is!" said Karl. "There might be other reasons why Niels doesn't come."

"You haven't been near me, either, before mother sent you."

Karl looked down, very red in the face.

"You are also in love with Trine."

"I don't understand how anyone can help loving her."

"I am fond of her too," answered Hans.

"Yes—like you are of Niels and me."

"Perhaps," answered Hans. "I don't know. I have been living in a dream. I lie here on this hill trying to wake up."

Later on in the afternoon, Mads came, on his way to a missionary meeting that evening, but he had started out early enough to enable him to save a soul on the way. He had the New Testament in one hand, the Old in the other, and a book of Psalms in his pocket.

"Shall I read a little for you?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you mean that you don't want to hear God's word? Perhaps you don't think there is any good in these Books."

"Oh yes, but it sounds bad, when you read it out loud."

"How can God's word, which is good, sound bad, when read by one of God's children?"

"Well, you ought to think that quietly over," answered Hans. "The fault can not be laid to God or his word."

"I will sing a Psalm for you," said Mads.

"I shall go to sleep if you do."

"Is there nothing which can make you pray to God?" asked Mads.

"Yes, there is, if you are really going to sing for me. I shall pray to God you know the tune, because you always sang false in school."

Mads sang a Psalm about those who were everlastingly damned.

"What do you think of that one?" he asked after the last verse.

"My prayer was not answered," complained Hans. "You sang just as false as usual."

"I shall certainly see that they pray for you at to-night's meeting," said Mads, severely.

"Thank you," laughed Hans, "but why do you say it like a threat?"

Mads went away angrily. Hans lay there watching him until he too became just one that passed along the way. Then Hans began to like him, thinking that is the way Mads ought to be. He got up, and walked down towards Peder Quiet's rye field. "Well, well, Mads is Mads and I won't tease him any more."

There stood the rye, nodding their heads, inviting him into their midst.

He sat a long time in near companionship with them. Friendship became relationship; he was as the rye, one that lives, grows, and ripens. So peculiarly natural. All the rest of the world disappeared. All that one wanted to do, and all that one should do, got lost—like the waves, at sundown.

In its place remained something natural. Something very small, but very valuable. It was himself, unselfish but entirely himself, without will, but strong willed always: without means, but entirely able, was this natural thing which was himself. Its outline was application, and in its application lay

its power. Through this application, followed an answer; something happened to him, like the ripening of the rye. It happened slowly in him. The application became intimate, and the answer became more clear. His purpose became quite clear to him.

But what it was, he didn't know, he only knew it was. It was present in everything. In his soul, in every fibre of his body, but he couldn't bring it out, face to face, and let himself be led by it.

It was like God, who couldn't be found, and yet one couldn't get far from him.

It made life happier to know about it. Both to be it, and know it.—

On his way home he met Mads, coming back from the meeting.

"We prayed for you," he said. "All of us, aloud and sincerely. I think you should have felt it."

"I don't know if that was it," answered Hans, "but I felt something good come to me."

Mads pressed his hand.

"Yes, time is so short for you," said Mads, open-heartedly and lovingly. "We all know you haven't long to live. We know you are tuberculous."—

## *Chapter 14*

### THE GENEROUS ONE

IT was the common belief that he was going to die; weak lungs one never got over, thought these people. Some kept away from him, others thought this was just the time to be good to him. Others talked about God to him.

One day a young girl came and sat with him. Her hair was long and soft; her eyes were big, and looked straight at you, but there was something obscure in their depths. When one's eye followed the lines of her body it went from one luxury to another. He knew that many had craved her favour, and that she had given generously.

It was Karna, who had been confirmed with him. "Why do you look at me like that?" she asked. "What are you thinking about?"

"You remind me of a rich and generous tree," he answered. "Many, many have tasted the fruit."

"You say I am generous. Many have asked me, and I won't deny. I have given to more than one. I suppose you despise me for it."

"No, I don't despise you," he answered.

"Well, you oughtn't to, either."

"I have told you, I don't."

"Yes, that's all you care about me."

"I have no right to despise you," he said.

"If you cared about me you would despise me whether you had the right or not. Anyone who wants can feel that way, but not you."

"But why not me?" he asked.

"Have you ever given a thought as to why I became generous?" she asked him.

He looked at her luxuriously formed body, and said:

"I thought——"

"Don't say what you thought," she interrupted, "because it isn't true."

"I suppose you asked me because you yourself wanted to tell me."

She was silent a moment before answering.

"Yes—I have been thinking of telling you for a long while."

"It's no use sitting looking down in the grass then," he answered. She looked up at him, and all the obscurity had disappeared from her eyes.

"You compared me with a tree," she said. "But what happens when a tree is full of apples, and the owner doesn't bother to pick them, but just lets them hang? Then the wind comes from all directions and the apples are scattered to east and west—He who wants may pick them up."

He thought that she was both beautiful and good and had rich thoughts, and he said:

"It's a wonder to me that the owner doesn't hurry and come for his own property."

"You're so far away from guessing the truth," she said, "that you can sit here and say this. Now you are sick, I can talk freely to you."

"Already in the last year at school, I looked at you with awakening eyes."

"I didn't know that," he answered, surprised.

"No, because you only had eyes for one—it hurt me so I began to look around at others. There were many who were larger and stronger than you, and some just as good-looking. But there was a light over your face."

"A light?"

"A light that forces us to look there, where it is, and we get no peace, before it shines over us. When it won't it hurts and does harm. That is the reason one forces oneself to look at others. And if one comes along and says: 'Stay here with me!' one stays—out of bravado and from a sick longing. But one doesn't find rest, because the light is in one's mind, and one goes on longing, until another comes along and begs. One gives, hoping to see a reflection of that for which one is longing. But one doesn't find it, and so one goes on. There is no peace anywhere, but there is restlessness everywhere, mostly in oneself."

"When you know this," he asked, "why do you go on being generous?"

"I can't tell you, because I don't want to be too hard on you."

"I can't see what damage you can do me," he answered. She looked at him a long time, weighing the question. "It's hard to talk to a sick man about his death."

"Not when the sick man is me."

"Have you really thought about death—and that it may come soon?"

"Often."

"Has it then, never entered your mind, that if you went out of life now, you would never have known the best in it?"

"Yes."

"And when you thought of the best in life, surely there spread a light over it, so that you almost felt that heaven would be a poor place if you entered without it?"

"Yes."

"But did it never happen that you thought of the best, and in such a way, that you felt ashamed of your own thoughts?"

Hans nodded, so she said:

"Then I don't have to say any more."

He laid his hand over hers; she looked up at him, surprised. She drew her hand away, but said, simply:

"Thank you for doing that."

After that she sat silent a long time, while the evening shadows crept over them.

"That light, you imagined to have seen——" he began. She cut him off short, saying:

"It wasn't imagination, they all saw it."

"All——?"

"The girls. It's the women that see it."

She turned to him suddenly, looking him in the face quite closely, but it looked as if her eyes were a long distance away.

"You are not afraid to talk about death——?" she questioned.

"No."

"Well—if those thoughts we talked about, thoughts about death before life has started—if they come again and are—as they should be—they are a long distance from me. But if they are of the other sort—those that made your thoughts ashamed, and made you only nod to me when you should have answered; and if you feel bitter over them—at yourself and your Maker, and if you want to live your thoughts for once—if only to forget them—I will come, if you want me."

She had got up while talking and was standing in front of him, seriously. It was quite a while before Hans could answer, in his surprise:

"Would you—if I asked you—would you even—when you know I don't love you——?"

"Yes. I would. And I believe I would be saved by it."

"What are you saying?"

"I would be decent, forever. You don't understand it. But now you know it; and now I'm going."

She walked out onto the road, and the shadows surrounded her.

## Chapter 15

### THE PURPOSE

WHEN the time came for harvesting the rye, Hans began to read again. He took to his studies in order to understand life. He stayed on at home, but ordered books in such large quantities that the peasants were overawed again. Could he possibly learn all these books contained? If so his head must be strong again. They all stand in Niels' library—Niels has a library.

One can follow the trend of his thoughts when one glances through these books. He began seeking in a naïve way without any idea where to begin, but without being discouraged. He ordered all Höffding's works, and quickly seemed to have found that for which he was looking. Some of his books seem quite untouched, others, especially the religious philosophical works are greatly underlined. These books seemed to have determined the rest of his purchase; they are all religious psychology and religious histories. From his underlinings one can follow his method of approach. He has been seeking for a purpose, a purpose for himself and of life. It wasn't a small order—or else it was just so small, it was a hapless thing to seek. Most people don't bother themselves about it. Some can't help it, and for those life is not easy.

The people seemed to understand this; the way he sat there walled in, and buried amongst his books. Things could not be easy for him, and his diary, with all his notes in it, proves that such was the case. Amongst the excerpts from the philosophical works, you catch glimpses of the outer world—one can

picture him lift his head and look out of his window for a few moments.

"29th October. The field looks full of ink spots. There must be good worms in the soil, as there seems to be enough food for all these crows."

"20th December. It's snowing hard. 'The white bees are swarming' as the farmers say. Remarkable, how it makes everything quiet. There goes someone out into the swarm. He becomes quite white. Now he has disappeared. It has taken him. All this which is falling, has taken him. It takes everything, it also takes one's thoughts—Ah, yes, but that which makes us think, it can't take. Nothing can take that until one falls down into the great silence and isn't even a snow flake any more."

"5th March. If only it would thaw. The snow out there has been lying since the world's beginning. The fields are waste and empty. Great white sheets, waiting to be pressed with green type.

"Types, ink spots—sight representation from books, flutter with one's glances out over the fields.

"12th March. 'Is there any use in all this studying when you are not in Copenhagen where the professors can tell you what you ought to know?' mother asks—Well, I would like to meet the professor that could tell me what I am in this world for. Use? No, I almost think she is right. Purpose—if there is one—it can't be caught and hung up on a hook to dry. All these thoughts about life, these views, theories, hypotheses—they are nothing but stockfish. What I am fishing after is a real live fish."

At last the thaw came. He closed his books, went out into the spring and let himself drift with it. Seldom has anyone been carried so naturally, so carefully or surely to the goal he has been seeking, as he was that spring and summer.

Brown cheeks, flesh on his body, and a happy expression on his face. At times you can find the same expression in children, when they have been alone long enough to forget, but not long enough to miss their elders. "What are you so happy about?" one asks, and the child for a moment lights off its eyes' fireworks in the face of the ununderstanding elder, smiles mischievously, says it doesn't know, shuts off, and lets the face mirror the world sensibly, calculating and dry.

It became a favourite pastime to stay and talk to him when passing the quarry, the young men said: especially the girls found pleasure in it, they must see something out of the ordinary about him. One girl being quick-witted said:

"No, he sees something out of the ordinary in us."

"Yes—you'd like that, wouldn't you," said the man.

"It makes you feel good when he looks at you," she answered candidly.

One of the young men went over and stood in front of her, looking at her with an openness that one only finds amongst the peasants.

"There, you see, that's the difference," she said. "He looks at our better selves, he sees only that which is the best in us, and it makes us good. You others are only looking for what you can get, and when you get it you don't care a hang about our better selves."

"Well, that's because he is a weakling," answered the young man.

When the harvesting time came, he was able to work in the fields like the others, and the doctor said: "I can't find any weakness in him any more."

At Whitsuntide he received an unexpected visitor. The son of the Mayor, Student Buchwald, who was home for his vacation.

"What in the name of the devil?" he said when he saw all

the books. "Are you reading all this stuff? Surely you don't mean to make this your subject?"

"Do you only read the stuff necessary for your profession?" asked Hans.

"Naturally. The other is just a waste of time. One must keep abreast with the most modern times."

He was studying law and worked very hard. "Law must be a very dry study," Hans murmured.

"But it prepares you for a very good position," said Buchwald, pointing at the books. "Surely there must be some meaning to all this."

"You can't go on fluttering about through all this, like a Ulysses—if you do you'll never get home before your rivals have snapped up the Penelope you were to sleep with, as well as all the good food you should live on."

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Pedersen?" asked Hans.

"The 'Lesson book?' Yes, I have. I met him on the street. Hm! As a matter of fact, it was he who put the idea into my head of looking you up. You seem to rest very heavily on his stomach. If you don't achieve your expected fame something will happen to his digestion.—I also have a message from Ellen—dear me, you are blushing! Just what was there between you and Ellen? She calls you her old sweetheart.

"I visited her in Odense on my way home. She is a worthy mother and Mariager is now a Major in the army: whether he is as a husband, I don't know. Goodness me, yes, they are very happy, but there are more things in this world than horses, as Hamlet says.

"When I left, she suddenly said: 'Give my love to my old sweetheart, Hans Larsen!'

"Hm! that flash in the pan," said the Major.

"Well, he was the one I was going to marry," she answered, looking dreamy-eyed and far away.

"‘You are more than satisfied with the one you have,’ said the Major, laughing. The conceited ass—I thought it a bit thick, in front of me. I can’t stand that Dragoon type. It hurts my æsthetic sensibility to see him standing there making her blush with a self-conscious smile. It hurt her as well. When she looked up at him I could see she was comparing things, and that she found his head much too small for his body.—Were you two secretly engaged? Her child is very sweet, he looks like her. There isn’t much ‘Dragoon’ about him.—"

"Are you coming to Copenhagen next year, to start making your name?"

"No," said Hans. Buchwald stared open-mouthed at him.

"There was a devil of a bang behind that ‘No!’ Anyone would think it was a crime to study. Shall I give old ‘Lesson book’ your answer?"

"Give him my regards and say I’m coming to see him soon," answered Hans.

"Are you really giving up Copenhagen and your studies?" asked the villagers.

This great massive letter-swollen beast they called "Learning" had, for some of them, stolen the aim and reverence from our Lord, and religion. This worship was probably not as natural nor deep, still, we all have it, and it gives one a certain sense of safety.

No, he was going to stick to the farm.

"We can’t understand you," they said. "All the young people are trying to get away from the country into the cities where there is life—not one of them can have your chances there. And you want to stay here where there is neither life nor future!"

"Don’t you realise that out here life is stronger?" asked Hans.

"Out here? No, we can’t say we have noticed it."

"That is just why I am staying," answered Hans. "If you knew how rich and full your lives are, I could go."

They came to the conclusion he was still a bit light-headed.

One Sunday Hans went in to Copenhagen to visit his old master. They talked together a long time. Late in the afternoon they walked out of the city, both of them silent. Just outside the city stood Gallows Hill. In the olden days it had been used as the place of execution, now it was an amusement park.

"Shall we go up there and sit awhile?" asked his old master. "Yes, here they were hanged," he said, as he sat down on the topmost bench. In the same strain he continued: "That which disturbs me most is that you're so young."

"I can't understand why it should disturb you," said Hans.

The "Lesson book" pointed towards the town below, letting his finger draw a half circle.

"Do you know how many churches you can count from here?" he asked. "At least ten. See how they stand illuminated by the sun. At one time they were this country's spiritual life; they meant our country's culture to me."

Hans looked surprised at him.

"I didn't know you were a believing serious Christian," he said.

"No," said the "Lesson book." "It was not the Christian life that rose before me while sitting here looking at these churches. It was Hellas. It was not the churches I saw which moved my thoughts, it was the vicarages I sensed. There they sat, these old parsons. Yes, yes, on Sunday, in church, I dare say they were Christians, but at home in the vicarage they were Hellenists.

"Were—I don't believe they are any more. The light is about to burn out, my generation's light. It seems as if people are becoming commonplace—I suppose it is the way I look at spiritual aristocracy. It's old fashioned. I am one of the few

left—a "Greek teacher." Isn't it true one can hear that the word means nothing—what do the young generation care about Hellas! Who wouldn't rather have a motorcycle than a fine edition of Homer or Plato? I can't blame them. There has always been a dividing line between the spiritual and materialistic. I know very well that life will never become mechanical and that there will always be some people who still have a soul life.

"If you had been ten or fifteen years older, I would have believed you were a belated Hellenist or a bigoted peasant who couldn't thrive in Athens. But—your age makes me uneasy. It means perhaps that the light is not failing, and that which I believe I still see, only exists in my mind's eye, and I can only see it with my eyes shut.

"Yes, I have a feeling I have been walking around with my eyes shut for a long time."

"But why does it make you uneasy because I am so young?" asked Hans.

"Because you don't belong to this soulless mechanical age," he answered. "And the life that is alive in you has nothing in common with these," he went on, pointing out over the churches.

"You won't find Homer and Plato there," said Hans. "These represent the Old Testament—and the New."

"I suppose you mean that the New has been lying against the Old so long that it has become mouldy? In any case we will never learn to know either one any more, because we can't read them; if we do we don't read what it says, but what we have been taught it says. It has been chewed and spread over with the teachers' and preachers' own 'idea-spittle.'

"It is really quite the same to me. I don't believe there is any more Christianity in me than that little spark of Hellenism

which is added to Judaism to make it pleasing to the European palate.

"I sit here thinking, the living youth of to-day is just as far away from Hellas, as the mechanical youth.

"If you can be taken as a symptom of the new age, you with no experience and no thought, only one in whom life goes with swift, strong streams, and does with you exactly as it wishes. It simply means everything that has been given us is thrown on the dust heap, Hellenism, Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism. Between you, youth divides itself into two parts. One goes in for motor-cycle racing on *Orbis terrarum*, and the others take off their clothes, stripped to the nude, without paying any attention to the weather, and stand with their bare feet on the earth in order to feel their existence. As if there had never been others in existence before they came and took the temporal as well as the everlasting in their possession—each where he finds them and as much as he can carry without the slightest knowledge as to clearness, of form or straight lines.

"No, no, if this is the new spiritualism, then I can't say, as Simeon did, 'I can depart in peace.' I suppose I am already a thing of the past, a mummy which is not beautiful or interesting enough for a Museum."

He sat silent awhile, leaning his chin on his stick.

"Perhaps it is lucky that one has five children to bring up: one is at least working for the new age—not one of the five has had gumption enough to learn Greek. Well, well, I do my slave work and spend my Sundays on 'Gallows Hill.'

"You have found your goal in life. Although it lies as close to the earth as the grain and the plough, I think it utterly fantastic—but I suppose you think I am fantastic because I have closed myself in a dream world of my own and because I sit at home in my room looking out over the 'Wine blue' sea, which my eyes have never seen."

He had found his life work. It would be more correct to say it had found him, it had grown up in him with the spring. In the diary (which is in Niels' possession) he has written for the "third Sunday in June."—

"I feel I must tell it to someone, and as I have no one to speak to about it, I will write it here. I write it in deep thanksgiving, a thanksgiving that is in me every hour of the day. Yes, even when I am sleeping dreamlessly, I believe it is there. I am not yet used to this great fullness, I can't house it, so that it flows over on this paper. I finish off this diary, with its many citations from learned works, with thanks—Not to the books in spite of what I owe them, but to the real living life.

"I have always loved the sun—the warm light. When I was little, and the day had such a long stretch one couldn't see from morning until night, and when the day stood there calling darkly from both sides—winter at that time seemed without end. The first part of it was cosy in the house, and new and amusing out of doors, but after the New Year the illness began. It was like the nostalgia, as I felt it in Copenhagen, the first year in the Latin school, when the cobblestones were hard-hearted and evil, the books overfilled with letters and the poor little garden at the back of Chamberlain Walburn's house painfully reminded one of the fields at home in the country.

"It was worse on sunny days; I think the winter sun was for me, what God's word was to the old smith who became ill when he heard it, just because he really believed in it. He was a clever man who would have felt quite at home in Paradise only he hadn't given it much thought, besides, he was very well satisfied with his lot on this earth; he never had any grudge against life until he was old and realised that it was too short. People thought that he was old enough and ripe enough to hear God's word. And so he was, but they spoke of

it with the chill of death around it. It was like the winter sun, which melts nothing and can't make anything grow.

"I was more lucky than 'Per the smith,' because father won a painting in a tombola. I am no judge as to its artistic value and will never be able to judge it, even if I, in time, come to understand art. Even the most ardent Catholic cannot stand in front of the picture of his saint and put a value on it, as a critic. To me it has been a holy picture, and I am sure I have prayed to it, if not in words then with all my heart.

"It represents a peasant's hut, the window is open, the sun is shining warmly right into the heart of the room; while outside are green trees, and in the distance some peasants in their shirt sleeves.

"This was how life should be! I saw, believed, and longed—but life in a wintry world is long.

"Sometimes it was so long that summer memories faded. Then I no longer believed in the picture. It was a dream. At times we dream such dreams as these, where everything is beautiful and light, where wishes fly out in all directions like doves from their dove-cote and soon after return with fulfilment in their beaks; but the world is different when we wake—this painter has had a good dream, and when he woke, he has painted men in their shirt sleeves, made the whole world filled with sunshine and blue heaven; with his winter coat on and blue frozen fingers. I turned from my holy picture an unbeliever.

"Summer came at last, just the same. I remember especially one—It was as like this last one as a twin brother—I stood alone out in the garden with a feeling as if I were alone in a dead world; suddenly it seemed that something had happened, and I looked around. No everything was quiet, crushed to death by the frost. In spite of all I had a feeling of expectation, as if I were listening to a living person's breath. A kind of

birthday happiness awoke in me; a good gift lay hidden somewhere near me; I felt I wanted to be good and give a good gift to the first person or thing I met. Suddenly a hen cackled, and I remembered we were at the end of March. Spring was near. I couldn't see it yet, but I had heard it breathe. A little way into April, and it arrived, and everyone could see it carried summer with it. All the good gifts came. A world of variety, each with its name, but all of it a part of the summer's life, green grass in the fields, the song of the birds in the air, white blossoms on the trees in the garden. June strewed roses and lilacs over the earth. Apples and pears appeared and steadily something more and new, but in it all lay the heart of summer.

"I went about in my shirt-sleeves, just like the men in the painting. I acknowledged its truth, but didn't pay much attention to it, for now that I had living reality around me the picture didn't mean so much to me any longer——

"Mother was happy because I went to church so often last year. She didn't realise I did it wholly and solely for her sake. I was completely frozen where church conversion was concerned. I thought the parson's preaching was terrible drivel, a gathering of lifeless words arranged differently according to the day's text—like mixing old worn-out cards, and dealing another round. It was no small sacrifice I offered to mother, sitting there Sunday after Sunday, receiving whatever I was given.

"Now I know that religious picture books are drawn from real life—if not directly, at least from memory and description. Now I know there lies a lot of truth behind the pictures and I can look at them with respect and love, but as I now have reality, the pictures have little value for me.

"I must thank the philosophers because they killed the myth about my gifted talents. I was brought up on that myth, and

religion! That I could understand anything which was printed was as certain as 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth.' I had no doubt that I could understand any philosophy in a twinkling of the eye. These learned men, who had written all these large complicated works, would have smiled if they had seen with what courage I started studying them; they would have smiled even more broadly if they had known what I expected from them: solving the problem of the life of humanity, explained in such detail and so clearly, it would be easy and convenient for me to decide my own job and place it in the plan of life—in the course of a year I had managed for the second time to have read myself into an idiot—this time with a humble understanding of my own stupidity. I had gained something from philosophy. It was a very small Hans who walked over the fields getting this confidence, this spring. They couldn't understand things, either, but managed to grow something good, which was more than I could do.

"There was a lovable light over the fields, which reminded me of the expression in a person's face, when they have perhaps a good idea but are not quite sure enough about it to tell it to anyone.

"It was the spring seed which was peeping through the troubled earth: 'Dear God, how small and easy to trample it down! It was a wonder, both that it was there, and that it could grow up to be food for the horses. I stood watching and watching; I couldn't tear myself from it. Once I saw a little child being wheeled in its perambulator. I don't suppose it could walk yet, or talk. It was surely a thoughtless enterprise for such a wee thing to enter this world, where so many things may happen. The mother pushed it along, met another mother with a perambulator, stopped and spoke to her. Both children forgot their mothers, pointed at each other, and couldn't keep their eyes off the other wonder: There is another like myself.

"That is the way I stood looking at the oats. I had never seen anything so weeny—except in my own self.

"Once before I have felt just as small as that; it was the day I met Hannibal, and stood there—nothing more than 'Erik Larsen's Hans.' But here I was even smaller because Erik Larsen was no longer a mighty father and protector, he was only a human, and I was no longer something which belonged to him. I stood alone as Hans. And Hans was no bigger than these oats which one really anticipated more than saw. Exactly: I anticipated myself. Small and valuable. Valuable and small. And living, like the oats.

"All else was lost to me. All I had known, had learned, had wanted, and had lived. I had lost all, except this very small and yet peculiarly valuable thing which was me. There seemed to be no more thought in me than in the oats. Its essence lay at the back of all thought, and was application. Application to what? I didn't know, but it was application to something real, because from this application followed an answer; there arose a relationship and in this relationship was—everything. Let me say it in an insignificant way. There was a deep happiness; it was as innocent as the green oats; it grew like that, it peeped up, 'over the earth,' up there, where my thoughts lay, and they threw themselves over it like a swarm of grasshoppers and ate it up.

"I remembered it only as a deep happiness, and thought that it couldn't be 'of this world.'

"In this world at the time I found myself very ill at ease, and when I, in my need, tried to relieve the application, there was no answer. I know now it was because I only applied my thoughts and wishes and not the whole of my being. This application must be without reserve.

"I was so young, I thought I was through with life. If I lived to be a hundred years old, it couldn't have been shown in a

more miserable manner. I felt I had tried everything. Love's happiness and love's disappointment, comradeships, passing pleasure, friends' flighty admiration. Not one stood by me when I left school and didn't continue to walk before them illuminated with intelligence.

"Reputation, here at home in the village, they held everlastingly under my nose like a snuff-box, so that I might not forget to take a pinch. As if I didn't know what it was worth. I had been at the very summit of the mountain of renown. Of course it was only a provincial and a county distinguished reputation but in itself it would never change, even if I spread over the whole world. I had tried its intoxication, felt its nausea, and knew an habitual drunkenness. Unhappy if I didn't get my daily snaps of this intoxicant, I would never become.—

"And when I let them down—not even the smallest and most hapless of the comrades was as worthless as I. Not a bit of sympathy, only scorn because I had let them down. How disgusted they were, these smiling faces with their secret pleasure over their own health, and their hypocritical solicitude for my weak chest—and head, which to their minds, had certainly gone to bits. They had absolutely decided it was better that I should die, as I wasn't good for anything, neither with my head nor my chest. It lay around them in the air, this belief, and became almost a craving, so that in the end I thought they would kill me through mental suggestion. This was just as terrible, but more honest than their fawning smiles: 'We have the paper with your picture in it.'

"Poor father and mother who suffered so much under all this, and went about looking at me with drawn, reproachful eyes!

"Give thanks, all of you, because you made it impossible for me to tie myself in love and confidence to you. If there had

been an abandon, or a hope which could have anchored me to the people's world, I would not have come into the other, because my application would have been divided.

"That spring day when I, crushed my others' opinions and my own feeling of incapacity, and the thought of my obviously being near death, stood there alone, facing existence, and said: 'Do with me what you will,' there was no *reservatio mentalis*, no little 'but make it bearable.' It was an application without reserve; it arose in me and tore wishes and thoughts along with it in its flood, and I acknowledged it was an *Amor fati*. Reckless and meaningless, how could I be infatuated by a fate I didn't know, and which was possibly a hard one? But I did. In my application lay a yes, without restriction.

"To whom did I apply, I who didn't believe in God? To reality, not to people's understanding of it, but to the unknown reality, whatever it might be, when all personal wishes, and imagination's curtain should be drawn away.

"The answer came with great strength. It was strength. This inner force couldn't be analysed to death. It stood beyond thought. The application continued to live, no matter how my thought fluttered about it, or enquired into it.

"I was carried along by the spring, into God's summer. Why shouldn't I say God? It is life's holy word though people have misused it and given it to the abortiveness of thought. They meant God just the same, even though they addressed themselves to a false deity who had their own features clear and enlarged.

"Answer followed always on application. All the good gifts came, a world of variety, each with its own name, but all of the essence of God; they came as the gifts of summer; varying, but all summer fruits; innocence, strength, courage, humility, fullness, tenderness, all different, but all from the essence of

God. They came like living things lowered down into me, and merged with this small but valuable thing which was me.

"In this time of growth there was nothing in the world but God and this small, impassable and deeply needed thing, which was me. Like the oats I knew of no other growth than my own. Like the flowers that couldn't be plucked, I had my aim in myself. So I grew up, blind to all else in this world where time and space didn't exist. In it is life, as the field was when God saw through me after my meeting with Hannibal.

"From here I at last looked out upon the old world, which is hung on the cross of time and space; the world where flowers are picked, the grain cut and everything is worked for the outer object. Then I was no longer in doubt as to my purpose here, or the reason why I also grew here: These two worlds were to be merged in me, so consciously, it would reach others' consciousness as a vague feeling; I was to be so transparent that through me they could see life's abundance, its duplicate—Holiness—the holiness that I myself had at times caught a glimpse of through Peder Quiet.

"I will not tell them about it. I will myself be this life, this marriage of time and eternity, so that they must notice it, as one notices the weather when one goes about one's work, and is affected by it. I won't explain; I will give.

"The explanation cannot be understood. The part of us which is eternal lies at the back of our thoughts, and deeper still. It breathes in the timeless air. Our thoughts which are born in this world's time and space cannot reach it: they are bound by their laws and can't step over into eternity, but they can be saturated with eternity's light, like a sponge which has been dipped in water. It doesn't become water, but is saturated by it, so that you can feel it wherever you touch it."

"So it's all wasted, all this money we have thrown away on your education?" said his parents, "if you insist on being a farmer."

He admitted the correctness of their reflections and answered, "Yes!" but wouldn't let himself be caught in their idle discussions.

Sundays found him in the quarry. People coming from church used to stop and talk to him, many went up there in the afternoons to be with him.

"When one met him there, one had a feeling that it was he, and not we who had been to church," said Niels while discussing that time.

## *Chapter 16*

### LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

POOR Niels, he had a difficult road to the quarry, and it took time before he got there. Since confirmation time Trine had been working on his parents' farm, and a natural friendship had grown up between them; this continued to be natural, but not in the same way; Trine's was mild and quiet, but with Niels came love's restlessness. Country love is rich with shoots. Children grow up with the animals, and the natural Eros has no secrets from them. A great many of the peasants go about their love making as candidly as their friends the animals. From animal bluntness one can in almost unnoticeable transition, follow love's development up to a demure refinement and natural virginity, which without doubt, has a more difficult time thriving where mystery's veil confuses the mind.

At this stage it is very difficult to define between friendship and love. About two people like Niels and Trine it is called refinement with a mild warmth, which is not without worship. That they were good friends was certain. There was a deep and quiet safety in their worship but on the surface were noticeable small restless waves of approach and escape, an approach which was so cautious often only the instinct warned, an escape so timid it could only be understood as girlish shyness. When he at last decided to talk to her, she spared him by confiding in him.

It was on a Sunday morning that he asked her to walk down to the beach with him. He stopped before an old white rose bush and stood looking at it a long while, as if he had forgotten about her. She could see by the expression on his face

she was in the bush, and that it was really at her that he was looking.

"This bush," he said at last, "has taught me a whole lot. It's a great many years ago now—I was just a newly confirmed boy, when I came here one morning and saw the rose had newly flowered. It came over me suddenly, as it stood there, no one having seen it, it had blossomed without me—there was such a—an innocent freshness about it: It looked like a young girl who had just said, 'Yes.' It came over me like a revelation; now I knew what a woman was."

He turned towards her, and she answered quietly, but with a clearness that should have warned him:

"What a woman is?—I have known that for a long time; I can't really say when I began to know, but there was no happiness in the knowledge, Niels."

"I can't understand why," questioned Niels. "To me it was as if all my happiness lay in this knowledge."

"It's not true when I say there was no happiness in it for me," she said, "but it was such a short happiness, and after, nothing but sorrow."

"Have you a sorrow, Trine?" he asked. "Who has caused you—did you have this sorrow while you were still at school? If so, I know the reason."

"I had it long before I started school," she said. "His parents and mine were neighbours, and they each had an only child, the one in the farm was a boy, and the one in the cottage was a girl. I don't know when I began to believe that it was on purpose that our Lord made that happen. We had been born to this world, and we were so near to each other, as near as brother and sister. I can well remember the time I began to think it was very well done by our Lord that He had given us each our own parents. It was much better that way. I saw that brother and sister could become unfriendly, but that

could never happen between us. The only drawback was we weren't both from a farm, or both from a cottage. But it was much later I thought of this mistake. Everything was good and happy—until the day in school—yes, you remember, about the Countess and the cane."

"I remember you cried so," he said. "I can imagine you didn't have much use for me that day."

"No, I was angry with you—because you had done the right thing," she answered with a smile. "After that I saw very little of him; he was ashamed of himself and thought I considered him a liar."

"So you went on carrying a grudge against me?"

"No, it was only that one day."

They stood still, each looking in a different direction. Finally Niels said:

"Have you never talked about—about—it, you two?"

"About that day?"

"No, about the other."

"It seemed it wasn't necessary to say anything. But then he went away, and since then he hasn't talked to me."

She told Niels that she thought she and Hans were engaged ever since that day at the cemetery. She had gone on waiting, but supposed it was all over now.

"You probably couldn't think of anyone else then," tried Niels.

"There would have to be a great change," she answered, "because you know, he has always been—the whole world. And I'm not sure if the world has gone under for me—although I suppose I ought to know by now."

"Why are you telling this to me?" Niels asked.

"You are my nearest friend," she answered. "I have never told anyone before."

"I suppose you would like to know what he thinks about you?" he asked.

She didn't answer; her face was expressionless, but the tears ran down in streams.

"I also want to know," he said, leaving her.

He went up to the quarry and said to Hans:

"There is something I want to ask you about."

He asked without any more hesitation.

When the answer didn't come at once, he sat down to wait.

He had to wait quite a while before Hans answered: "I suppose you are wondering why I waited so long before I answered you?"

"Yes," said Niels.

"I would like you to try to understand why," said Hans. "It's true Trine and I belong to each other. But I was away for a while—far away, further than from here to Copenhagen, where I was living.

"When I came home I was sick—at least, everyone thought so.

"Then I became well and healthy again. But I knew there was a feeling between you two, and that kept me away."

"It can't have been out of any feeling for me or for her," said Niels, "because if so, you couldn't say you and she belonged to each other."

"But we do, just the same," answered Hans. "It lies deeper than that which is between you two now; it is grounded in the very heart of our existence—there, where even love can't reach. Even if you two got married it would still be the same. It can't be changed."

"You believe this," said Niels. "And still you said nothing to her."

"There has been something I can't explain," answered Hans. "I know now I will stay at home here in the country, and will

run my parents' farm. I know exactly how it is run, or how we are to live. I can see this quite plainly. Then comes the part I can't explain—and from now on it doesn't matter."

What he wouldn't explain was—many times when he had been watching the work and life on the farm, as it ought to be, he had also tried to see Trine as wife on the farm. This was where his imagination died, and there was only empty air where Trine should have been. The death and the emptiness was so paralysing that he, in those superstitious moments that come to most of us, thought perhaps he was going to die suddenly, before he got married. At other times he thought: "I have been hypnotised by this vision that I was to die and can't yet entirely believe in a long and happy life."

When he didn't go to her until Niels came for him, it was because this well of life that surged up in him overshadowed all other feelings and made it easy for him to believe that he didn't want to stand in Niels' way.—

## Chapter 17

### OVER BAUNEHÖJ HILL

THEY walked along the road—their old school road.

“Now that we are together again,” he said, “it seems just as unnecessary to say anything as it always was.—But you must have wondered why I kept away from you?”

“I thought you had forgotten me,” she said.

“Well, I had forgotten you, as at nights one forgets the real life while one lives in a dream world, and believes in it. Then it is often as if those people who are one’s nearest, simply don’t exist. That’s how it was with me, but now I am awake.”

“I suppose there was someone else?” she asked.

“Yes, there was another in the dream. But now the world has come out newly made—like the day I saw you on the other side of the gooseberry bush with the heavenly berries. Here you walk beside me, and I know we two will be the first people in a new world—you remember, don’t you, God gave us the blue heaven.”

“You haven’t forgotten our games of make-believe?” she asked, for it seemed with the memory of these he became hers only again.

“We used to play them once,” he said, “and now we are going to live them.”

He knew she walked there beside him, waiting patiently for him to say that which never had been said. That was also why he was here, but he was so overcome with walking beside her, as if they had never been away from each other. All God’s created things hummed in the new born life of his consciousness, and wanted to be with him. Fields and hedges ran

away from their masters and existed only for him and her; the road, that nice old convenience, ran amuck revelling in an excess of life, which was not at all suitable for a conservative old highway. He laughed and her eyes twinkled up to him, in question, if she might laugh with him; but it was impossible to tell her he was laughing because the old road tried to lure him into cutting osiers to make whistles out of, and put the one in her mouth and the other in his own, so that they could go whistling towards the school, as on the last day before a vacation which suddenly popped up and said: "I almost thought you had forgotten I existed."

Over there came the cross road, acting as if it still had some ghosts at night. And there stood Baunehöj Hill!

Baunehöj Hill! Look, how it tried to look big, that little hill. It became a mountain, it became that which it was before he had seen it and could know this secretive life's mountain, from people's talking.

"We are going over Baunehöj Hill," they said. "Four times we have to go over it, for christening, confirmation; when we ride to our wedding, and the last time, when we are carried over at walking pace."

Now they walked there, both of them, up life's mountain: they knew it now, they had always known it together, their feet knew it and fell into step as in their school days, when they could go together, knowing so much, without having to say a word. Not only the day before vacation, with the whistle, but all the good days together, got up from the dead and went with them and lived in them, changed from a you and me to we.

Things that seemed distant were suddenly near. The post-hole in the yard where he used to wait for her on his way to school—Ah! it was like standing there in a happy second together with her; yes, even things that didn't exist any longer,

lived in them: the fallen cherry tree outside her parents' house, that, and the other which still stood. Things they both had forgotten were in them. All the world was in that "we." With a clearness which made the daylight pale they looked out over the world from this "we." Baunchøj Hill too, not the little one they knew so well, and not life's mountain over which humanity had to go four times—but a little hill down in a peculiarly foggy world, where we are you and I, meeting and parting, remembering, forgetting; where the way is long and there are steep hills and a sneaking fiend who is called age, and a dark depth which is called death. This clear "we" knew we had to go down into the fog to meet in vague recognition as you and I, because they had to—yes, what was it they had to—daylight became normal again, the overpowering clearness was like a glint, they remembered each for themselves.

They stood on Baunchøj Hill, as you and I, and they desired each other.

This sudden torrent of love was so violent, he forgot its origin. He closed his eyes in ecstasy over the discovery of this secretive, ungraspable being, woman, who gave life and ambition; she who forever should be desired and never fully attained, always enticingly new—like life itself. That which came over him now was not new, he had felt it before, but now for the first time in all its strength. He met it for the first time by the fence around the Latin school yard, when she went by, and since then many times on Copenhagen streets, when Hans' and Ellen Buchwald's eyes met, short, hasty, hidden, intense. She who still got dreamy-eyed when his name was mentioned.

The desire crept over him that this dream should always be found in the depth of her eyes, and show glints now and then in their everyday surface. The dream of a brilliant future came back to him, but pure and clean, without any personal want

for honours. It was life itself which got his love. He stood on Baunehöj hill and was married to the service of the explanation of learned works toward an unattainable end. He saw his place in the plan of existence; an object that is used awhile, gets worn out and is thrown away. Never ending, life walks through us, over us, uses us, then smoulders us away, richer through our existing moment, richer through our death. Along the highway of History stands a row of stones, gravestones over the chosen, who served development, the small truths, meteorites along the endless road, towards a final truth which can never be reached, but is always struggled towards, so that life for every new generation shall become clearer, the acknowledgement cleaner than before. The army of application advances; men fall by the way, but new ones step into the ranks and the advancing army never stops. He himself is called as a soldier, perhaps more than a common soldier, in advancement's self-forgetting army.

Before him stands a little peasant girl who is in love with him, but he is far away from her. His world's picture is not hers: they don't live in the same universe. He has emigrated from hers, and an infection from the old crumbled religion had still been in his blood and given him "hallucinations"—an "hallucination" of an "eternal" sphere, wherefrom they had both stepped "down" into this peasant world. It is possible that it is ever so difficult to get old superstitions out of one's system.

But she had to be helped home, the little peasant girl who went and fell in love with him even when they were children, and now, had not managed to get any further. He starts to walk quicker, he is trying to think of an easy way in which to tell the unvarnished truth, and she follows him terrified, alone, without understanding, and without daring to ask.

He stops on the playground, desperate at having to trample

her down. He can't say it now, because he has given her reason to believe. And he meant it when he went to her. He remembers, but can't understand it. He is split in two; his consciousness is near bursting point and still he is on the verge of breaking into laughter; laughter is inside him, his ego laughs at his ego.

She stood there ready to burst into tears; she had a feeling as if she were in the way, and it made her unhappy. Her eyes didn't leave his face, and when she now saw it become drawn she forgot her own despair in her need to help him. She stepped up to him and took his hand, holding it closely in hers.

When she stood there, little, good, and faithful, with his hand in hers, he had a feeling that it had happened once before, long ago—perhaps before they were born. He felt the old superstitious performance working on him, through her, so he took away his hand and turned from her.

As he turned he suddenly had a vision. As his eyes rested on the school, it suddenly raised itself from its foundation, stood a moment swinging, then began suddenly whirling around while bricks and furniture were thrown to all sides. When, terrified, he looked up the road to steady his eyes on something else, he saw the smithy rise, whirl about and disappear. Now the most terrible thing of all happened: the whole world stood on end, bent round like a wheel. Schools, Universities, laboratories, factories, museums for eternal Art, rushed, jumbled about and mixed up, into the big wheel which now began to roll faster and faster driven by its own weight down Baunehöj hill. Wilder and wilder became the speed down life's mountain until they all disappeared.

This vision was so vivid and its reaction so violent he thought for a moment the end of the world was near, and he had been given warning. But in the mighty silence that followed he understood it was something which had happened

in himself. It was a culture, a world picture which had left him for ever. He would no longer have anything in common with it. His work in life belonged to another universe.

The sun from the new universe already began to spread itself over his face, like the smile which seems to say, "Don't worry, everything is all right, but everything is different from what you had thought. How it is I can't tell you, because the one who translates this knowledge is forging words. It can only be found in the knowing—and in one who is in close contact with him."

In the new universe, so entirely different from the one the others still lived in that no natural explanation was possible, because the words didn't have the same meaning—here he was to begin a new life together with her. A new Adam and a new Eve were to lay the foundation for a new people.

He expressed himself with the same words he had once used as an impulsive little boy, in this very same place:

"God shall have back His garden—and all His people." Here where she had given him her hand for the first time, when he stood alone amongst all of them, and was laughed at, he at last said the word for which she had so patiently waited.

## *Chapter 18*

### DANCING

HE went to work with the others; they could notice no difference between themselves and him. Harvest came; in this village it had still kept some of its old character; machines had not yet come between people and the earth's gifts. Machines were used for reaping, but the people still had to bend to the earth to pick up the corn and press it to their bodies in order to bind it into sheaves. Their hands touched it all, the smell of straw and grain mixed into their breath and hung in their clothes. The work made their arms and backs ache, but a mild happiness crept into their minds, a heavenly happiness of abundance, for this was next year's food for man and beast which they were gathering in. The horses nipped at it while the carts were being loaded; boys and girls rolled the rye and wheat in their hands to loosen the husks and ate of next year's bread before it was made. When eating time came and mother's food basket arrived on the field, they sat themselves down, tired and satisfied, on old Mother Earth, with their heads against the sheaves; bread and beer were passed from hand to hand of the connecting circle of workers. Lying there in the midst of their food, they enjoyed it as if it were a sacrament, a big, united church which wasn't aware of its own holiness. They were only doing their duty and received their pay accordingly. Priests and parsons also have always had their pay, the whole world over. But these children were without false pride, and the mild happiness flowed from their minds out into their young bodies.

After the food came the festivities, the big celebration when poor people piously overate themselves, where the elders with full stomachs and enormous thirsts gathered around the punch bowl, while the young found each other in the dance.

Harvest festivities last until late in the season. Everyone knew each other very well and shone with kindness. No one can enjoy their festival with better consciences than the farmers at their Harvest parties.

Here one saw Trine, looking like a newly blossomed rose, dancing in Hans' arms, and Karna became more generous than ever, going from one to another—for a short time.

It was at the third party she and Hans met and he asked her to dance with him.

When it was finished she walked out into the garden, staying there a long while. When she came back he danced with her again, twice in succession and all through the night he often came and took her arm for a new dance.

That night Karna went home alone.

At the next party they met again. Suddenly it happened; he broke all rules and regulations for dancing, let himself go, allowing the music to dictate, and Karna followed like a flame gliding with him. Couple after couple left the floor until those two were alone. They all watched, not two who were dancing together, but two who were creating music and rhythm which took form, which clearly, beautifully and freely expressed the other's vague longings. A new form of communication was found more intimate than words.

There was wild clapping when the dance was over, but Karna heard nothing. She stood where he had left her, every line in her body a revelation of soul, silent only while dancing to music no longer heard but still felt. In her eyes remained an expression of ecstasy, which every one could see, but she didn't realise anyone was present. She walked to the door as if in a

spell, put up her arm and leaned her head against it. The music started again, but no one asked her to dance. Only after Hans suggested that Niels dance with her, did the others follow, Hans also danced with her again, quietly and simply.

About the time one had to part and start home, someone called:

“Hans and Karna!”

They looked at each other, stepped out on the floor waiting for the music.

“What do you want?” asked the man with the violin.

“Play whatever you like and we will follow, improvising something.”

The music played and he improvised with the feeling that inspired him.

That evening Karna walked home with Hans and Trine.

It got to be a habit, and at all parties Hans and Karna danced alone at least once.

All the men, who before had openly gone to Karna with their own short-lived desire, regarded her now with deep respect and now they could no longer go to her.—

So they continued through the grain threshings's dust and dirt, through November's ploughing and mud, not a very gay time for mind or body.

With Christmas came the white snow and rest. It was winter with ice on the bay. One often saw two people on skates out there, when they had a little free time. They didn't perform just plain skating as the others did. They practised dancing and difficult swings. It was Hans and Karna. On Sundays they were there all day, but usually off the beaten track, by themselves.

At last they were ready and wonderful dancing was to be seen on the ice, forwards and backwards, away from each other and towards each other, around arm in arm, she held high

over his head, or swung around in a circle, holding his hands like a rope.

The young people watched with a developing sense of beauty and grace. The older folk sniggered and talked about a circus. The women drank coffee and talked. Hans' mother was also given coffee. One day she had to ask him:

"You're not going to marry Karna, are you?"

A naughty, teasing smile crept over his face, he walked towards her with out-stretched hands, as if she were a young girl he was asking to dance; the naughty light in his eyes disconcerted her, her knees went soft and she faltered backwards: "Why boy!" she said, and walked away to the window, looked far away over the fields, far away into a puzzling world, sighed a little over something which is not to be had, over young people, who one day become old, over a longing she had forgotten, because life is so entirely different from that which we hoped in the beginning.

There she stood, a little ruffled hen, with blinking eyes, and felt for a moment her new wings just strong enough for flight, which had in reality been cut ages ago to a sensible length.

She couldn't manage to look up at the young rooster she had herself hatched out. Not by him did she want to be reminded of all the nonsense which makes the world go round like a *carrousel* for the young and unclipped.

But in Jesus' name, even in the names of lesser people, forgive us our sins.

She hurried in to tidy up her nest.—

Trine also got coffee.

"What do you say to all this—Hans and Karna together so much—and in such a way?" asked her friends.

"If I don't say anything about it, surely all you others have nothing to say," answered Trine.

They lost their breaths at that, and forgot to chatter.

## Chapter 19

### THE WHY AND WHEREFORE

**I**N the following summer something happened to determine him in his views. It happened suddenly, not understood by others than himself, but it must have been around midsummer time, because in the beginning of the summer he was certain he was going to live and work there in the village like all the others and, by his own life, gradually change theirs.

When he wasn't with Trine, he spent most of his free time up in the quarry, busy with his own thoughts but always friendly with those, who, passing by, stopped and disturbed him with their talk. Some people—such as Rasmus Snak and Niels paid long visits to him there. A stranger did the same. He had his home and work in Copenhagen, but stayed in the village all the summer. With this stranger Hans showed a talkativeness one could almost call confiding, if it hadn't had its growth in a friendly indifference. He considered the stranger as one who didn't belong in the village and therefore was outside his responsibility. But it amused him to think his thoughts out loud in the presence of this man. To this indifferent stranger he talked about that which lived in himself, the others he wanted to affect directly, and if any of them—for example, Niels—forced him to say anything direct about his life's aim, he was very careful. His dislike for any ready-made opinions was enormous. Often he took refuge in Rasmus Snak's methods, especially when he could get Rasmus to use them. This happened one Sunday morning, when he and Rasmus lay up in the quarry talking to the stranger and Niels.

Hans put his arm under his head and looked up into the

sky. It was probably in order to be at peace himself that he started Rasmus off with the following remarks.

"You are a Theological graduate, Rasmus. Have you never preached?"

Rasmus remarked with one of his side-long glances:

"There are those who hint that I have never done anything else."

"But you have never had a church?—Why not?"

Rasmus said in his peculiar way:

"I didn't like to take money for it—and also I didn't like having a Bishop or an Archdeacon over me, telling me what and how to preach."

Rasmus stopped as if he had said enough, but Hans kept on asking:

"What made you stop and stay in this village?"

"The necessity of adventure and *wanderlust*," answered Rasmus. "I started on my wandering and came to a place where my sorrows and my pleasures hobbled my feet and gave me blinkers so that I saw no more of life than the place where my sorrows and pleasures lay.

"There came a time when neither sorrow nor pleasure bound me to this place any longer. When I looked up and saw from all around, my youth's desire coming toward me, I asked: 'Where on earth have you been, and why do you come to me now?' Desire answered: 'I come from where there is adventure and from where luck lies hidden.'

"Then I answered: 'I will get up and follow you, my desire!'

"I took my walking stick and went out to find the place where adventure and luck are to be found. The place which always lies in the back of the beyond.

"One day I found this quarry where you come and sit most of the summer. From here I could see how the four corners of

the fields looked wondrous and strange. I didn't know which corner I wanted to choose as a resting place. I tried them all, but grew more restless than before. Each corner I tried made the others look more enticing. I finally stayed in the quarry where I could see them all. I saw farther than the fields, I saw the whole village. The farms and houses lying spread out over the country-side, and I felt that adventure lay in all of them—as long as I didn't go near enough. In this way I saw through my thoughts out over the whole world, and I felt my youth's desire come walking towards me from all directions, followed by an unseen element, and I asked:

“‘Where do you come from now?’

“‘From nowhere; from everywhere in the wide world,’ it answered.

“‘But why do you come here?’

“‘To find adventure and luck,’ it replied.

“It suddenly dawned on me, looking from all other directions, my position where I now sat was just perfect. It was the far away where adventure and luck lay. Then I saw what the invisible element was which followed my youth's desire. It was peace.”

“But adventure and luck,” asked Hans, “were they really here?”

Rasmus nodded.

“Won't you tell us about it?”

Rasmus sat awhile, thinking, while he chewed a straw. “If I live long enough, I will write my life's pilgrimage, and if anyone will print it, your children can read it out loud for you. By that time there will be nothing left of Rasmus Snak—but his chatter.”

“Rasmus, I can plainly see that I will be your successor also in foolishness here in this village, because I also lie here in the quarry seeing a new world spring up from the village.”

"Is that why you stay here instead of going away to study?" asked Rasmus.

"Yes."

"Do you think you will get people here to understand?"

"No, the old people must remain in the fog."

"In the fog?"

"Yes, there is a fog of ages of thinking lying about them, and they think it is clarity; but life is hidden from them. Their thoughts are no longer a result of their lives. They have been filtered into a 'mutual thinkers' fog.' Spiritually they live in a world-fellowship's age."

"Do you want to think 'new age' thoughts?"

"I am not so advanced, but a new life will live in me."

"The new life is most likely a very old one," said Rasmus.

"Spring is very old," answered Hans, "but it is new every time it comes."

"It's absolutely beyond all understanding why you won't continue your studies, with that brain of yours," grumbled Niels. "Surely you have a constant thirst for more knowledge. I know I have!"

"I have wanted to know many things," answered Hans, "but there are already enough people who know them."

"Our knowledge, Niels, we have. It can be bound up in books and set on the shelf. It can be remembered and it can be forgotten. I am striving after a knowledge which is not that which we have, but that which we are."

"Surely we have to die before we get that knowledge," said Niels.

"Hm, think, when once all life's problems are solved, and all 'why's' shallows are sounded——"

"It is a lovely psalm—but this 'why,' does it also make you wonder?"

"No, I lie here, just as I used to on the playground where

there were no 'why's'—Tell us a story as you used to then, Rasmus!"

Niels gave him a match, and Rasmus started:

"It must be about forty years ago, now, there was a big congress in Paris, of all the world's Scientists. There were learned lectures, studies, respects and honours, festivities and much food and drink. There was altogether too much of life's good things.

"One evening two young scientists were walking home together from a large banquet. Suddenly one of them said:

"'Why—! Why should we go home so soon? Let's go into a café and have a glass of something or other.'

"They went in and sat down and all the festivity which had bubbled and sparkled like champagne, fell like a deathly silence around them.

"One managed to smother a belch, took off his medals and sat there dingling them.

"'Why?' he asked, and laughed mockingly.

"'Why, what?' asked the other.

"'Everything, I am fed up with it all. I have reached the belching point from knowledge, honour, amusement, food and drink. Why the devil have we come here to Paris, why do we travel anywhere? Why are we anywhere? Why are we?'

"He hiccupped, and the other answered:

"'I think we had better get home, and to bed.'

"'Why?' asked the first one, 'I cannot sleep anyway.'

"'I will give you a sleeping draught,' replied the other, 'I also suffer from insomnia.'

"At home in their hotel, he gave his friend the sleeping draught, but when he was about to take his own, he suddenly threw it away and put his clothes on again.

"The next morning the maid handed a letter to the first one. It said:

“‘I have gone. Now, of course, you will again ask “Why?” So do I.’

“No one heard anything more about the one who had written the letter.

“About thirty years later people began to talk about an old man who lived deep in a forest somewhere in Central Europe. A man who was friendly with all the animals and when people met him they almost believed they had met Jesus Christ himself. This old man was like Jesus Christ in a way, because he seldom said anything, but listened very patiently to anyone who came to him with their troubles and tribulations—while confiding in him they seemed to grow lighter of heart.

“All these stories came to the ears of a young theological student who had settled somewhere near there. When he had been told it so often it began to irritate him and he went into the forest in search of this old man.

“He stayed in the forest several months, although it was a hard winter. He was the first person who had been able to make the old man talk about himself. When the young man came back, he wrote in the papers that the old wise man in the forest, was the same person as the young and brilliant scientist, who, thirty years previously, had disappeared from the great Congress in Paris at that time. He told of his visit to the old man in these words:

“‘It was a hard and very cold winter when I went into the forest to seek him. When I met him, I no longer thought about summer or winter, I forgot all the seasons of the year. When I came out of the forest, the snow had melted and bits of green were coming up out of the fields, the colour of happiness, like a blush on a person’s face, and I felt something good and beautiful was sprouting in me as well, giving promise of growth.’

"One of the people who read all this, went out to the forest and asked the old wise man:

"May I stay with you and be your pupil?"

"The wise man nodded and the young man never left him again. A friend visited him and asked:

"Why do you stay here?" The other answered:

"Because 'he' knows the answer to the big eternal 'Why' and he says that in a short while I also shall know it.' And his friend went back and wrote all that in the papers.

"Several years passed and there was another great Congress in Paris. This time it was a meeting for all the Psychical Research Societies. They decided to send a representative out to the wise man in the woods in order to get his answer about the great 'Why.' A Frenchman was chosen; he went to the wise man and asked:

"*Pourquoi?*"

"The wise man turned his back and walked away. The Frenchman went back to his society.

"What is the answer?" they asked.

"*Rien,*" answered the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, *Voilà!*

"A German thought: This eternal question cannot be answered in clear, ordinary French. The German language has more depth and rhythm, I will go:

"He went to the wise man and asked:

"*Warum?*"

"The wise man turned his back and walked away.

"The German went back and told his society, 'The question is without answer. It is so deep it can't be told—*nicht einmal auf Deutsch.*'

"An Englishman now took the word saying:

"The big 'Why' is a universal question, and can only be answered in a universal language, and—well, English is the universal language."

"He went also and asked:

"*'Why?'*

"The wise man again turned his back. The Englishman went home and reported:

"*'Why—well—there is a football match in Chelsea to-morrow.'*

"Later they tried asking in Latin and at last in Esperanto. But the wise man wouldn't answer.

"A Dane suddenly remembered that the world's Saviour was born in a little country, so perhaps the answer could be given in such a nice, quiet little language as Danish.

"But since he was Danish, he at once looked with both pride and distrust at his own language, and thought it would be good to have something foreign in reserve. So he wrote to a countryman friend who had wandered out into the world, asking him to go to the wise man and ask him in Danish—if not, in American. He got an answer at once, saying:

"*'What the devil has it got to do with me?—I have gone to America. What about the hundred crowns you owe me?'*

"*'I'm sure I could get the answer if I dared really to believe that I could,'* the Dane said to a Norwegian friend.

"*'Why the devil don't you really believe then?'* answered the Norwegian.

"*'I don't dare,'* said the Dane, *'because if I do the whole city will laugh at me, and all the music halls will take it up, and I will be in the humorous papers at Christmas time.'*

"The Norwegian stood up. He was a full grown northerner.

"*'The whole of Copenhagen can't laugh as loud as I can,'* and off he went.

"One winter's day he arrived in the forest on skis, looking for the wise man and his pupil. When he found them he said:

"*'I am a Norwegian!'*

"The wise man nodded to him in a friendly way, called his pupil and walked away.

“‘Why can’t you answer people when they come all this way to ask you,’ grumbled the Norwegian.

“‘Because they don’t ask properly,’ answered the pupil. ‘You have not asked, but have told us what you are: that is why you shall have an answer. One should not ask “why” but “wherefore.”’

“‘Wherefore?’ asked the Norwegian.

““Wherefore,” and how shall I be, in order to get an answer about the eternal “why,”’ said the pupil, ‘to begin with you should ask yourself.’

“‘Quite right. Who the devil should decide if not me,’ said the Norwegian, ‘when I am as I should be I can come back and ask “Why?”’

“‘You can, but you won’t.’

“‘Why?’

“‘Because then there will be nothing to ask about. You will know everything without asking.’

“‘I believe I would rather be as I am,’ said the Norwegian and left. Back home in Oslo he declared:

“‘The truth is here in Norway—and the rest—it lies in ourselves.’

“‘He was the only one who came anywhere near the truth—but even a Norwegian has his limits.”

Rasmus stopped and emptied out his pipe, when Niels said:

“‘It seems we are exactly where we were before; all this about how we ought to be is the something we hear in church every Sunday.”

“‘Well,” said Rasmus, “Let’s go home and sleep on it.”

## Chapter 20

### THE RASPBERRIES

ONE afternoon Hans and Trine were walking up to the quarry together. Trine was very preoccupied. She wanted to say something, and he walked along silent, waiting for her to speak. They reached the quarry and sat down awhile. After a long silence he said:

"Tell me what you are thinking about."

"Yes, I feel I must," she said. "Yesterday your mother called me, asking me to come in. We went out into the kitchen garden and your mother pretended she was working there, but it was only every time her eyes filled with tears that she bent down as if to pull out weeds."

She was silent a moment. Hans said: "Come, tell me all about it, Trine."

"Your mother said: 'You are now engaged to my son. You have talked to him and played with him ever since you were small children, that's why I feel I can talk to you about a mother's anxiety.'"

"She looked up at me, with eyes I shall never forget. It suddenly came over me how wonderful and terrible it is to be a mother."

"She said: 'I have a boy, Trine, my only child, and he isn't mine any longer. He is alive, but he has gone where I can't follow him. I had a warning about it once, when he was in his cradle. We hadn't had him long—he was lying in his cradle and I was standing over him thinking how lovely and how helpless he was, when suddenly he woke up. I was his mother, and it was wonderful to me. I felt I had been chosen by our

Lord to take care of one of His angels. I picked him up; he suddenly looked at me and I nearly dropped him. This isn't nonsense I'm telling you, Trine. I forgot it for many years, but now I see it again every day, and I am sure it was a warning. He looked at me as if he wanted to examine me thoroughly—my character and my intelligence and everything a person tries to hide from herself. It looked as if he thought: "Are you the person who is to be my mother? Yes, perhaps you will do." It looked as if he thought the matter over, and in his eyes I saw such a depth, it made me feel dizzy and I was frightened, because it was a world I couldn't reach, and this world lay in my own child's eyes.

"I have a son who was a good boy, a better boy than any of the others have had, but it has come again, everything I was warned about when I picked him up from his cradle. My son looks at me across a big, deep water. I often think those who have their children in America and receive letters from them are nearer their children than I am to my boy who lives in the same house."

"I said to her: 'But surely that which you see in his eyes must be good?'"

"She answered: 'Yes, it is good, I believe, Trine, because he has always been good. But it doesn't help any, being good, if it is not of God, and that is what I am worrying about, Trine. Is it from God?'"

"This is what your mother wants to know, but doesn't dare to ask. 'He is my son,' she said, 'but I don't dare to ask him. I'm afraid of the answer.'"

"You believe in God, don't you Hans?" asked Trine.

He looked at her with a big smile and she said happily:

"Yes, Hans, I can see you do."

"Of course I believe in God," he said, "even to say, 'I believe,' is not enough—even in this there must be a reservation."

"In God?" she asked horrified. "Surely He is eternally the same."

"But you remember," said Hans. "He doesn't live in the blue sky any longer. He has moved, but He hasn't moved any further away from us."

"I am like your mother, I'm afraid," said Trine. "I don't understand you."

"You are not to bring them out of the fog into the fields out here," said Hans. "You are to come to me fresh and newly made, to see the New Heaven and the New Earth."

"The New Earth?" she queried. "What difference is there between the new and the old?"

"The same as a dark face that suddenly lights up from a smile," he answered, "and the New Earth's smile is sunshine from the New Heaven."

"And what is the New Heaven?"

"The sunheaven,' I call it when I think about it. It is a place which isn't a place but a movement, a love which flows in all directions and reaches all places."

Trine sat silent thinking about it.

"If we get a New Heaven, surely we must be able to feel the love which reaches all places."

"So you do."

"Yes, when I am sitting here," she smiled.

"Yes, because here you are without a parasol."

He saw her questioning look and explained. "I can see almost everything in other people. Not each individual deed they have done, but thoughts which lay there fermenting in their minds. Their attitude to heaven. I can see over their heads a beautiful parasol. There is a beautiful and intelligent face painted on it and many lovely pictures. It is their own portrait and their own deeds and wishes. They are almost all the same these faces and pictures, but they have one peculiarity,

they are only beautiful when they are painted on the owner's parasol—the parasol which keeps the sun away from our souls.

"Before I know where I am, I am playing our old game of make-believe in real earnest.

"We will let mother and all the others live in peace in the fog which has always rested over their heads.

"So when mother asks you if I believe in God, say 'Yes.' Then she will be happy and thankful and look up into the blue sky, forgetting it is empty, and expect to meet me there sometime. When you say I believe, she will think of her own God and be happier than if you should come and give her one of the golden oranges we dumped down through the blue sky.

"But you and I will sit quietly and see the New Heaven and New Earth; and like the first two people, we will work in God's garden."——

Peace and quiet settled around them. Time saw they had no use for it, so it went away, tending its other duties without bothering them. When Trine at last looked up, the sun was settling over the bay.

"Hans," she whispered, "when I sit here with you like this, it seems so natural that we should work in God's garden. It is as you say, heaven and earth become new, and I have always known it would happen. It seems God the Father goes around invisibly amongst us in His garden, and I expect every minute to hear His voice near me. He will call us as He did Adam and Eve for there is no difference between old and new.

"When I begin to think and your words rise from my heart to my brain, my mind becomes disturbed. You say you believe in God, and I know you do. But then you mention your mother's God—then there is a difference between the old and the new, and I feel frightened. Are you so sure there will be something new, and that it is necessary?"

"It is here already," he answered, "but it is growing so slowly one hardly notices it, and it is so natural one thinks it is the old, and so it is in a way."

"Now I don't understand you," she said.

"Once I had a part of our garden to look after—you know—where the raspberries grew. I picked the berries and was told, in the spring I was to pull down the old part of the bushes. Then winter came. The raspberries only existed with sugar and as jam. In the spring I worked in the garden and remembered the old bushes which were to be destroyed, but I couldn't see the difference between the old and the new. I let them all stand. After a while small green buds came on some of them and I knew these were new. But I wouldn't touch the old ones yet, because I didn't want to destroy anything that still had life and might shoot new sprouts. One day all the new part was full of green leaves. I then cut away the old ones without any more consideration. They were entirely dead. There was only the jam left from them, and even the jam was nearly finished.

"The root from which the new branches has sprung was the same as the old branches, and the berries which grew on the new branches were new berries. Everything was new and still there was no difference between the old and the new.

"Every season has its new growth, Trine, that's the whole thing, and there is no reason to be frightened when one sees the old branches die; it is only because a new spring is rising out of the old root."

"In a way I understand all you have said,—it's only when I go alone thinking, I feel how stupid and heavy-minded I am in comparison with you, and that you will never be satisfied with such a one as me. It would perhaps have been better if you could have had the one you loved in Copenhagen—she

would be able to understand and follow your thoughts better than I. I feel I get so far away from you and will never really be a close enough companion."

"You are not to go worrying about these things, Trine. You are not supposed to think my thoughts for me. It's not in our thoughts we are to be near to each other, it's in the way we live."

"In this I'm also afraid I'm more—limited—in every way, than you," she replied.

"Yes, yes," he nodded, "there has been a fence put around each of us, and we are bound to remain inside it. But that doesn't need to part us. Think of a window in a house. It also has its pane, it may be so many inches long and so many inches wide. It could be larger and it could be smaller, but that's not what makes it a window looking out over the world. It's transparent. There is clearness before it, behind it, and in it, it contains the unlimited in its few square inches. And that which makes us two belong together, Trine, is this; we have the same transparency in both quality and colour. It isn't the size which counts, it is in the clearness, newly cleaned transparency that we are to be one—and in this you are on equal terms with me."

## Chapter 21

### IN THE QUARRY

ONE day towards the end of vacation time, the stranger walked up to the quarry. When he saw Hans he decided to stay with him awhile. It was the day on which HANS, after a long talk, made the startling statement which the stranger couldn't believe. But when he came back to the village the next year it had already happened, as Hans had said it would.

It was good to sit in such harmony and peace. One could almost believe the New Earth had already come. The stranger being a child of the times couldn't sit still and believe a heavenly life could exist in this world of sin. He had to poke about and ask questions.

"You seriously mean," he asked, "that a new life can come to humanity?"

"Yes—or a new universe—whichever way you like to express it."

"You really believe it?"

"Yes, I know it can."

"Know?"

"Yes, I am myself living this life."

"I understand—you feel——"

"No, no, I am the new life.—You are very polite, but you are more honest than polite. It's very plain to see you think I am full of self-assurance and conceited. It is true I have faith in the life which expresses itself in me. But conceited—It is not my deserts, it's my luck that the new life has become my life."

"Couldn't you tell me something more definite and understandable about this new life," asked the stranger.

"I wouldn't even like to try."

"Don't you want others to understand it?"

"No."

"It is enough for you that you have it yourself?"

"No, no, I will gladly give it to anyone—in small portions or in large—to anyone who will receive it. I live and trade in this life. My actions are like bees. They bring the pollen for our life with them and impregnate those who can be impregnated. So the new life's seed is to talk about it and understand it. There is no hurry—you belong to those who are favourable to impregnation."

"Ye-es, perhaps," said the stranger. "But I would like to understand so that I could perhaps live this new life exclusively."

Hans looked at him, studying him closely.

"For the moment you had better continue in your half-conscious condition."

"Half conscious?" The stranger didn't look very pleasant. Hans laughed and said:

"There is no insult in my advice—just the opposite. The half-conscious ones are the real source of the new life. The whole and absolutely dead certain believers and the whole and absolutely fireproof disbelievers have shut themselves off. They become sterile and die. But the half-conscious ones are their spiritual children and become bearers of the new life."

"I suppose you are entirely conscious?"

"I am only one example, an 'announcer of spring' which comes and then disappears. I do not count—outside the little clique in which I live. I am a peasant from this village—but there will be many sprouting capable half-conscious ones in this village.

"Of course, we are only peasants, but it is possible there are

many 'announcers of spring' round about in many villages the world over who leave living half-conscious ones to look after themselves. From these you get the Genius who pours the new life out over the world. I almost said like the sin flood. Yes—I mean like the sin flood; because much of that which is big and fine and of distinction now, will drown in the new life."

He looked at the stranger, made a little grimace and blurted out:

"Now don't sit there speculating in your head so that life dies out of your body. You are really more hardened than I thought. You are busy settling your ego by itself in your head. Most people do that now-a-days. You can see it on their bodies—Nothing but dead flesh. One can see they are only fit for pains—and of course for the stomach. It's obvious that without a body one couldn't taste anything.

"Look at our big prophet, Peder Quiet—yes, he is a prophet but doesn't know it. Can't you see that the whole of his body is just as much soul as it is body. The 'me' which is called Peder Quiet, his arms and his legs even his rump, living and thinking. Of course it all passes through the central station, the Capitol; but Peder has never allowed himself to be made into just an ordinary servant in the Central Station. Do you never feel as if you would like to touch him? Don't you feel as if it would be healthy for your nerves and you would become good if you touched him? That is because the whole of his ego lives in his body.

"Have you never seen a little child sitting eating a biscuit while he gazes at his naked legs,—how the little toes play and talk together? He watches them playing and becomes friendly. They are small 'me's' these playing toes, and they give him so much pleasure he wants to do something in return, so he bites off a bit of his biscuit for them.

"Peder Quiet is grown and knows the toes can't eat, but he gets his nourishment elsewhere. But you can be sure he thinks it quite sensible that the little one bites off a bit of his biscuit for his toes.

"You may well laugh, but I tell you in these things lies the road to salvation—both here and in heaven. I know most people would find this ridiculous—but they also think salvation laughable.

"It's quite reasonable that one finds the dream of salvation ridiculous when one never meets any sign of blessedness of life in reality.

"It's also just as ridiculous to believe it comes after death when one has never noticed any sign of it before death.

"The possibility exists just the same—both before and after.

"But how can one expect to get anything if one is too lazy to try?

"The funny part of it is that salvation requires less trying than anything else one desires.

"But it requires belief—not in ideas, but that it exists and is the inmost essence of life.

"Every person has his own. But our culture is a brain culture; we move our ego up amongst our thoughts' solid walls, and it doesn't spread itself over our whole bodies where blessedness should have flowered. The ego at last reaches a stage where it is one's religion or one's outlook on life."

"Ah yes," said the stranger, "that's always something. There is surely always a means."

"A means?" repeated Hans. "No, a menu card. But that doesn't serve the dinner. Experience something first and then explain—or don't explain. Keep quiet and belong—like Peder so that you may feel life's fullness when one is together with another. Now, more than anything else we need life more than learning."

"Life and learning could surely be merged together," said the stranger.

"They bring out each other," replied Hans. "Learning comes from the prophets' lives: from learning one seeks nourishment for one's own life; when one has sucked up all the life out of learning, only the empty words are left, and learning loses its power. Then life must be experienced anew again without the guiding hand of knowledge, and reality which lies in lack of knowledge must be met face to face as if we had never seen it before. Amongst those who dare this, one will arise whose life is so sublime it has become knowledge. Then all the old prophets, saints and wise men come to life in a new life. All will be able to see reality through their word's veil, and learning will once gain be able to give people nourishment from its reality.

"But to-day the one who can say something interesting is more highly appreciated than the one who can be like Peder Quiet. Peder means nothing to this world—only he is one of the chiefs in the kingdom of Heaven.

"Down there is the field. Doesn't it look as if it is happy because it belongs to Peder!"

"It's possible that it is only in your mind," said the stranger.

"Perhaps, but it comes from Peder," answered Hans, "and shines through my eyes, out over the fields, so I see it in happiness."

"I can't quite understand your contempt of brain culture," said the stranger. "One must surely work for more and bigger knowledge——"

"You are a real city man," Hans remarked. "Why do you come here to the country when you always have to speculate and 'discuss' here in the midst of all the good which stands growing in peace. 'Go hence and do likewise.' Of course it is necessary to have knowledge of what one is eating, and to

manage one's life, but the gathering of unnecessary knowledge is bad for one's spiritual health as too much eating is bad for the body. There are altogether too many overfilled stomachs and heads. The desire for knowledge—yes I very well know I now make myself guilty of the worst heresy to be found, transgressing against the Holiness of this age. The desire of knowledge just for the desire to know, is humanity's worst and biggest vice."

"You have surely forgotten that much of the knowledge which is in practical use has come from people who were seeking knowledge for its own sake," argued the stranger.

"Naturally, I know that," replied Hans, "but it doesn't impress me in the least. We could just as well have done without all these convenient inventions. Not one of them has made us any happier or better."

"That may be," answered the stranger, "one can then say the same about the whole culture which——"

Hans interrupted him.

"Exactly, and that is why I don't give a damn for culture. Goodness and happiness—two things which can't be parted—are all we need: the rest——" he shrugged his shoulders.

"Hm! well," he said a little later. "It's not knowledge as a means I'm hitting at, but when knowledge has become the chief aim there is something wrong, but the very worst is when knowledge isn't knowledge about real life but is only theoretical.

"That is why I have so little desire to gratify your curiosity—or if you prefer it—your eager desire to know about that which I call the new life. Yes, I talk to you about it, but that is only because I have no responsibility about you in that way. If you were a peasant here in this village I would only speak to you about the crops and the weather, while I, in the meantime, saw to it that you experienced crops and weather and

wind in all its force and real seriousness—as I myself did at one time, when I walked with Peder Quiet while he ploughed. Peder was so living in all his silence, it seemed to me that God Himself, the source of life, was walking beside us.”

“Oh, so you believe in God?” asked the stranger.

“If I say yes, or I say no,” answered Hans, “how am I going to know I am giving a correct answer to your question. God? There is the word which is called forth in me under close communion with that which it is impossible to describe because it has no limits. This is full reality—God is really and always operating. I don’t believe in God; I have communion with God who is always working in me. Something is always happening in me. I am, and I live, in this meeting.

“Is it this full reality, this real fullness you mean, with its unending being—or is it a thought of this higher divinity your phantasy has created. This abstraction with which many seek to complete an unfulfilled life, and to which you now and then raise your eyes away from life to find rest once in a while, sympathy and courage, now and then, intoxication—if nothing else one can work up a strong irritation by proclaiming Him—is that the God you are thinking about?

“This God is a dream. Many believers dream this beautiful dream. It isn’t always that it is beautiful. As a matter of fact I think the best of them get something real and good out of their dream.”

“What about the unbelievers who deny this dream?” asked the stranger.

“It makes so little difference,” answered Hans. “Now and then they meet the richness of reality without knowing they meet God. They don’t dream, they are like the sleepless ones who think they ‘haven’t closed an eye the whole night.’ while the one who carefully peeks into their room has found many a little moment when they have been absolutely unconscious

and away from their proud self-centredness and resting in God's arms a minute. There both the dreamer and the sleepless one rests now and then, otherwise they couldn't exist.

"To acknowledge and to deny God in the word is of no importance. Communion is the decisive. He who has this communion loves the name by which he first learned to call this inexpressible with which he has had communion.

"This communion can be uninterrupted. Rasmus Snak told us one time a story about St. Peter who called upon humanity to give all their moments to God in exchange for everlasting life. Peder Quiet does it naturally, without any shouting and noise. He is entirely human, just as easily at home in both worlds. He is connected with everything even when he is using the things. He is connected to his corn when he is harvesting it, with the scythe when he is swinging it.

"Don't you understand it? Then imagine that Karsten Nymand gives a boy twenty-five öre for bull's-eyes. See him before you! See how he has a reason for it. He thinks about the bull's-eyes, he thinks about the twenty-five öre; he certain the boy first had to do him a favour—he gets the twenty-five öre for something—if for no other reason it would be to make him thankful to Karsten.

"Peder, of course, knows that money can be used for bull's-eyes, and that the boy can't get bull's-eyes without money. So he gives it to him. But that which precedes the real event, is not the giving of the coin. It is the connection between Peder and the boy; something happens to each of them and between them and as this living thing happens between them, Peder's hand puts a twenty-five öre piece into the hand of the boy. The money plays a peculiarly small part, it is only a symbol, an outer sign of a mutual pleasure. Believe me, it takes quite a few minutes before the boy realises that the money can be used. And then he hardly wants to use it. When he gets it

from Karsten he knows at once for what it can be used. Ah! he is so quick and intelligent when he is with Karsten! The twenty-five öre is only a piece of money, derived from that half part of life which Karsten knows, and where 'utility' lives, where twenty-five öre and living people have aims outside themselves—and only outside.

"But Peder Quiet in whom there is no difference between the present or eternity, he is—although he knows nothing about it himself—a holy man, and everything he touches becomes good. His working materials become temple instruments."

He looked at his watch with a smile:

"You have lured me to talk away a whole beautiful morning, and I am very miserly with them."

He got up to go, and the stranger said, as he also got up to walk a little way with Hans:

"You can be glad, because it is the last morning I shall waste for you this summer. But next year I hope to waste a good many of your days."

Hans stood looking at him a moment with closed face and his eyes hooded. Suddenly his peculiar haunting smile broke forth, and he said:

"Next summer you won't find me, I shall not be here."

"Where will you be?"

"I shall be dead," he answered quietly.

The stranger looked this healthy and strong young man, up and down, and finally expostulated:

"Really, you don't know what you are saying."

"That's exactly what I do know, but there is no one else besides me who knows—and now you. It amuses me to tell you."

"But surely there is nothing the matter with you, man."

"No, there isn't."

"But then——"

"It was silly of me to have told you, but it happened in a moment of good humour. You won't understand a word of it, when you see me standing here healthy and strong and sober.

"That's that—I have given my will to it."

"Has—has anything happened," began the stranger. Hans answered very seriously:

"Yes, something has happened. Even if I wanted to explain, I couldn't, and if I could, I wouldn't. But—but since I have talked to you about this—please be so kind, and don't discuss it with anyone. In exchange I will give you a certain amount of explanation as to what has happened.

"Not now, but next summer, when you feel like wasting a morning on me, and I am not here—if of course I am not here, I am not certain for it may be next summer or the one after—I only know it won't be long—go to Rasmus Snak and ask for the story called 'the choice' which I have given him.

"It was a day shortly after this had happened which lies at the bottom of the story, I suddenly thought how much Rasmus has meant to me, without my really knowing it. I decided he was to have a message from me when I died. So I wrote—in his own way—a story about that which has happened. Not word for word, naturally, but easy enough for Rasmus to understand. Because he is different—quite different from what you all think."

He was silent, looking out over the fields and there seemed to fall a listening sort of quiet over him, and the stranger thought, if he had been a painter he would have painted the beautiful young man standing there in the midst of the landscape in which he had been reared, lighted up by the sun, with a listening attitude as if he were hearing things grow; so quietly he stood, the stranger also had the feeling that it was possible to hear the grass growing.

Hans turned his head slowly towards the stranger and said

quietly, as one speaks in a room in which a child is sleeping:

"I would like to remain here a little longer." He sat down, folding his hands over one knee, and continued to look out over the fields in the same intent manner.

"I shall wait for you until you go," said the stranger, "if you don't mind."

Hans sent him a calculating look.

"Not if you promise not to speak," he said.

"I shall sit perfectly quiet," promised the stranger, and it struck him, he had answered quietly and obediently, as a child speaks to a grown person who doesn't want to be disturbed. He looked surprisedly over at the young peasant boy, who was so much younger than himself, and could sit there with a quiet authority to which he quite naturally bowed. He sat down a short distance from Hans, and watched him closely.

As this young peasant now sat, with his slightly open mouth and eyes, which no longer saw anything, but which expressed a look of receiving, thankfulness and pleasure,—the stranger had an entirely new view of him. He kept that passive look with which one regards a statue which unveils its living life for the onlooker and which mirrors itself in his face.

There flowed life to him from this figure, and he suddenly realised what this young peasant had meant when he said God followed with Peder Quiet and himself when they were ploughing. Something God-like and holy surrounded this un-moving figure; it came to it and passed out of it. He could feel it as plainly as one notices a slight breeze against one's cheek or a breath of the fresh morning air in one's lungs. It forced its way into him, and he remained sitting open and willing. Yes, one can say his whole body was a wordless prayer that this might continue until he was turned into the person his inmost heart had always known he should have been. Then the change came. To begin with the heavenly life had probably come from the young peasant sitting before him, but

it had felt as if it were his own—as if the part of himself which was eternal had suddenly been freed, and had flowered out and become conscious of him—but now there came a strange force! It flowed from a being whose superiority and purity made him bow his head, ashamed of his own unworthiness; every dirty corner in him was filled with light. Terribly small he felt in the presence of this young peasant who now lifted his head as if he had been called upon, and courageously received heavenly gifts from the great unknown, from the strange invisible Being.

How long this had lasted he was never able to tell, but when it was over, Hans said quietly:

“Now you understand what I mean. You don’t for the moment doubt that it was real. This is what I mean by experiencing first and explaining afterwards.”

“But here, it wasn’t only a reinforcement of life that came to you. There was an invisible Being present,” exclaimed the stranger.

“Yes,” said Hans. “This time there was, but it isn’t always that it so happens.”

“Do you know who it was?” asked the stranger.

Hans nodded, and the stranger said—and he knew the words he in this moment found so reasonable, he would later on think about with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Was it—was it—Jesus?”

“If I say it was He,” said Hans, “and if I say it was not He—you will in any case before long think I was a victim of hallucinations and you were hypnotically converted by my belief of its reality.”

“You are right,” answered the stranger. “I am like that.”

“Then why should I tell you who it was. It’s up to Him to reveal it Himself. Just wait until you know it, from Himself—if you ever find out. My words will never convince you.”

The next day the stranger left for Copenhagen, and he never saw him again. When he came back the next summer Hans Larsen was already buried. He had grown "weak" they said, in the autumn, and he wouldn't have a doctor, although his health went quickly downhill. At last they got the doctor without his consent. They called his old doctor, Dr. Hansen, who examined him and talked to him a long time. He went away shaking his head, and said to his parents:

"You can just as well stop sending for me again." They couldn't get any more out of him.

They called Doctor Bang, who came to sign the death certificate. "Tuberculosis," he wrote.

"So you think he died of T.B.?" said Hansen, when they met in town.

"Of course he died of T.B.—certainly."

"No," said Doctor Hansen. "I examined him earlier than you, and you can insist he reached a stage of weak lungs before he died, but I knew him and know he was entirely well and healthy. Die from something he had to, and it might be that it looked like tuberculosis."

"Well, what the devil do you think it was?" asked Doctor Bang.

"He killed himself by mental suggestion if you want to know my opinion," answered Dr. Hansen.

Hans' own explanation follows, as he had written it for Rasmus Snak. He must in the meantime have forgotten it, because it was found in his diary with the rest of his books which were sent to Niels. Rasmus Snak had not received it.

It isn't a direct explanation of what happened, it is a story written about a real experience, written for Rasmus Snak, in his own story-telling way.

It is called: The Choice.

## Chapter 22

### THE CHOICE

HE lay on his back under the hedge looking up into the sky. A transparent cloud drifted slowly by over the blue heaven.

It was so fine and light that the blue way back of it could plainly be seen, and looked as if it were alive and itself moving the cloud.

"It looks like a soul with clothes on," thought Hans. "That is how I sometimes see people—when they stop being closed I can see right in to decision's depths. Now when the sun stops being sky, it isn't any more—and still it is—if it wasn't there, I couldn't lie here looking up into the sun.—"

"It has only left the blue sky to go into the sunheaven! It is a cloud, but it is all sun!—"

"But this has happened before!

"Or is it happening now for the first time, and the other time just a presentiment?—"

"Have the years really gone by, and has the cloud I then saw come back from its trip around the world?—"

"Or am I still lying here looking up at the sun to see if I am good enough—and the years have not yet come?"

"Everything looks like it did at that time.

"No—it must be 'that time.'"

He closed his eyes lying quietly and in a little while he thought:

"Yes, it is 'that time'—because here comes the sunbeam which I climbed up."

He took hold of it, but dropped it again thinking:

"It can't be 'that time' because I have become too heavy—or too tired—to climb up it."

The sunbeam quivered. Some one was talking down through it.

"If you can't climb, you can let yourself sink."

"That's true," he said. "Of course."

So he sank deeper and deeper in himself—right until he reached the depth of decision, where lay life's purpose.

"That's funny," he said, "it's as clear as day here—I always thought it was dark as night."

He took off his clothes and jumped head first out into the clearness. There he lay following his fancies, resting happily on his back, now and then taking an energetic turn of strength, and swimming a few strokes.

When he had been swimming a while he came to the blue heaven.

There sat St. Peter outside the door with his hand under his chin spitting on the ground.

"Why are you sitting here?" he asked. "God has moved."

"Oh, so you know it," answered St. Peter, "then there won't be any trouble with you! Keep straight ahead and you'll soon be there!"

"Aren't you coming along?"

Peter shook his head irritably.

"I have to stay here and show the way."

"But you have a sign up there!" He pointed to the sign with an arrow painted on it and letters: "To the sunheaven," plainly printed.

"One can get into heaven without being able to read," said Peter, "and besides, I have to take care of the prisoners."

"Prisoners?"

"Yes, the ones I can't get to move on; there are not such a few of those you must remember."

"Yes, but surely the souls want to go to God?" said Hans.

"No, they only want to get into heaven. I point up and say straight ahead—as the sign does, but then they show me their passes——"

"Passes?"

"Yes, their conversion and belief—and demand that I open for them. There's nothing in there, I tell them; but they answer; they have heard that before but have never let it affect them, and they have no reason to do so now—so there's nothing else for it but to let them in."

"What do they do in there?"

"Oh, different things. Sometimes they sing, sometimes they paint each others palm branches. They mostly discuss the different scriptures and that's always tiresome because then they fight. To begin with I thought that perhaps something good would come out of it, because they pushed the case in under God's judgment and decided to seek Him to get His own opinion.

"‘Well,’ I thought, ‘now they have found they need Him over their fights, they’ll realise He isn’t here, and then I will slip them on up to Him.’ I already had the door a wee bit open when suddenly one of them insists on repeating his version so the others will remember it and see that his was right when they hear the answer from God’s own mouth. Then another comes with his; they begin fighting again, and forget God altogether.

"And so it goes on all the time."

"Yes, but don't they long for God?"

"They say they do, but that is just a form of speech—like ‘Good-day.’ No one thinks anything about it. But they are certainly afraid of Him—I can see it by the pictures they paint of Him—and the fighting, because none will admit the others resemble Him."

"Pictures of God?"

"Yes—I think they prefer to worship Him in an—effigy—I can't speak much Latin, but a little still stays with me from the time I was in Rome. Its reaction was felt even in Palestine; we used to speak Latin amongst ourselves there too."

"Yes, but my dear Rasmus——"

"If you want to pronounce my name in Latin it is 'Petrus' and not 'Rasmus.'"

"I beg your pardon," said Hans. "I beg your pardon. I mistook you for some one who looks like you, especially when you are telling me something."

"Is he a fisherman?"

"No, he is a Theologist."

"Then he doesn't look like me," grunted Peter.

"Yes, but the prisoners, as you call them, must surely soon find out it isn't God's heaven that they're in."

"How should they notice that?" asked Peter. "Heaven is only something they believe in, they have never noticed it in themselves. I said it to one once who was unnecessarily stubborn."

"'Do you think you can get into heaven?' I said. 'There isn't a bit of heaven in you.'"

"'I have my papers here, very sure and certain——' and he handed them to me. They were as nice and clean as when he first got them at his christening, and had never been touched from that day to this, when he handed them over to me—what are you looking so dumbfounded about?"

"Only about the heaven around us which we have in us," Hans answered. At the same time he noticed St. Peter looking like a small pin far away. He looked around and found himself in the sunheaven.

Before him stood the sunchild. He was entirely sun and his

clothes were made of white sun material, which sparkled in all colours according to his thoughts.

"It seems to me I know you," said Hans.

"Yes, we played together as children," said the sunchild.

"We gave each other some cherries."

"That time I climbed up," said Hans. "This time I sank in a heap."

"Both ways are just the same distance."

"Where is God?"

"Here."

"Yes, I can feel Him, but I would like to see Him."

"You are not entirely sun yet—but there is a lot of sun in you. That's why God has sent me to you. He would like to have all the sun in the village."

"I know," answered Hans. "I saw it down in the depth of decision."

"That is why we have given you your full strength and health," replied the sunchild.

"I noticed quite plainly that the strength came to me—both physically and mentally, and if that could only continue——"

"That is just what I want to talk to you about—you are sure you now quite understand the purpose of your being?"

"Yes."

"And you don't feel you could wish it were different?"

"No."

"Not more brilliant so that it would bring you honour?"

"No."

"Nor give you work in another sphere, such as Art, or Science?"

"No."

"You will stay faithfully inside your fence?"

"Yes."

"Right—you have now been accepted in the Sunheaven's

service. It is necessary for you to live and to die in such a way that the sun which is in your soul, shines out over the village and remains there after your death."

"Yes."

"It is God's will that you give the parish your heaven. It shall be as close to them as their own breath. They shall hear it in the cows lowing and the lark's singing, they shall notice it in the perfume of the clover, and see it in the growth of the grain.—Will you live for that—or will you die that this may be? God gives you your choice."

"I will live."

"You choose the harder. The time is long, and there are many temptations down there."

"I will try to overcome them."

"We shall of course help you with them."

"Then I shall be able to overcome them."

"Yes, your own. But the others—can you also overcome theirs?"

"The others?"

"Here where you are now, time lies rolled together; it doesn't know us, and we don't know it. But I can unroll it for you and show you its pictures."

He made a move with his arm and Hans saw himself down on earth. The pictures came floating like scum on a stream. There, walked Trine and he, home on the farm, working. Kristian Nymand was their nearest neighbour, married to Trine's best girl friend. Everything was pleasant, and a new picture floated along. It was he and Kristian, changing horses. But it didn't look natural and he said to the sunchild:

"That's wrong; there is something wrong about Kristian!"

"No, it's the horse," said the sunchild. "It is blind."

He saw himself walking off with the blind horse, Kristian

rubbing his hands and thinking: "He could be the best in school but he's no good at horse trading."

The pleasure of revenge was in Kristian and he went from farm to farm saying about Hans: "He hasn't the head for it."

The pictures continued to float, they weren't to be stopped nor changed. He went into Kristian and said to him: "I know you fooled me on that horse, but we can still be friends just the same." Kristian felt Hans was better than himself, and he couldn't stand it. On one picture stood Kristian's wife talking over the fence to Trine. She was crying and said:

"I am not allowed to come over to you any more. Kristian won't allow it."

Then came the great parish election, when the decision was to be made as to who would have the power in the parish, and the chance of changing it to suit himself. Kristian was chosen; he had used every foul method and bribery; that is why he was chosen. Hans didn't get in at all, and he walked home disappointed. "How can I help them when they shut me out?" he thought.

A woman stood in the doorway, when he came home. It was Karna. She had been working there a long time it seemed.

"Where is Trine?" he asked. "I want to talk to her."

The woman smiled and said: "You are talking to me."

He became uneasy and asked, "Are you Trine or are you Karna?—I can't tell the difference between you. Which are you?"

The woman answered smoothly: "I don't know. It's such a long time since you saw any difference in us that I no longer know myself, Niels."

"I am not Niels," he shouted. "I am Hans, your husband."

"Hans or Niels," she answered, "the answer is the same. I see no difference."

"Do you want to see more?" asked the sunchild.

"No," answered Hans, "but is it possible that it will happen like that?"

"It is possible that it will happen like that," answered the sunchild. "It depends entirely upon you; if you are stronger than both your own and others' temptations."

"I know I am not," murmured Hans.

"Those people down there can escape death. Both their own and others' deaths are necessary so that their souls can live. Would you like to see the other way?"

"Yes."

The sunchild made another move with his arm and once again the farm was visible and clear down on earth. But Kristian Nymand owned it. He stood in the doorway talking to his wife.

"Here he played as a boy, where our boys are now playing. This was his house, and we will hold it in honour. But if he had lived we should all have been better. Now we have to remember how he was and try to be like him and as good as we can."

A new picture came floating. Election time was at hand. Kristian stood up and spoke: "There is one all we young people would have voted for if he had lived. He is dead, but there is another who has taken on his work after him. All the young people have done that in a way. Niels was his closest friend, and we young people follow Niels."

The pictures floated and passed and new ones followed. The gooseberry bush stood in the hedge with new yellow berries. Trine came out of her parents' house, where she was living alone now. She was walking with a dress in her hand. It was Karna's. She stood with it on her arm, hesitatingly, blushing. "Shall I put it on or not?"

She walked to the little glade near the house and sat down, laying the dress near her, took it back again, as if she couldn't

make up her mind. Heaven was blue over the light tree tops. Sun spots were scattered over the green carpet under the trees. She bent down and picked one up, laying it like a golden ring around her head: the light from it shone over her face. She got up, walked over to the churchyard and went straight to a grave. It was Hans'. While standing there the light from the sun spot grew brighter on her face; it spread over her whole figure until she stood in a dress of white sunshine.

Hans noticed this dress was the sun from his own being, which poured down over her, and he thought: "In the sun-heaven there is no parting."

Down by his grave she stood saying:

"In love there is no parting."

A young girl came walking toward her with lowered head. It was Karna. She pointed at Trine's dress of white sun material and asked: "Won't you make me a dress like the one you have on?"

And Trine answered: "Of course, I am a seamstress now. Come with me home and I will make you a dress like mine."

They walked together to the house, past the gooseberry bush and the little glade.

When he had seen, Hans said:

"If this means death, I choose to die."

As soon as he had said the words it seemed it was ten thousand years since he had thought them.

The salt of the world came streaming towards him, he was a moment here and a moment there and exclaimed with wonder:

"What has become of the fence which stood around me, has it disappeared?"

The sunchild answered:

"It's still there, but you can't see it because it is all sun. The fence is all sun."

"Yes—I see it now," said Hans. "A golden glow is still over it."

The sunchild asked:

"Do you know where you were when you thought the fence had gone?"

"I was in the arms of God," he answered, "and I shall never forget it."

"No," said the sunchild. "Now you are prepared."

"Yes," answered Hans. "I am prepared."

## Chapter 23

### PREPARED

AUGUST'S golden light lay over the fields; sheaves flew from the earth up on the cart; smiles flew from face to face.

"It's like in the sun heaven," he thought. "Ah, this perfume of the grain can never be taken from me."

The grain was put under cover, the fields died and lay still as stubble fields. But up between the stubbles peeped a new life, a fine grass which the cows loved, and he thought:

"When I lie quiet in death, like something which has once been, I wonder will there spring up ever so sparsely something clear and healthy in their minds which will look out over my summer which so quickly passed. In remembrance?"

September came with its pure quiet smile and that eternal quiet in which life and death mildly meet.

The hazel trees hung full of nuts. He had never seen so many before. Apples and plums became red and yellow: never had the garden been as rich as this year. Life had never been so light as in this September. Every year happiness was gathered here under the hazel trees. The nuts knew it. Here on this big stone he had sat when his father let him taste his first nut; up on this stone he had stood when he for the first time tried to pick them himself, while his father held the branch down for him. He could still see his father's face, and understood from that how much better a nut can taste in another's mouth than your own. Happy for the one who eats and happy for the one who gives and watches. Lucky company for both. Here he stood when his teeth had grown strong enough to

crack his own nuts and here he has picked nuts for Trine. Yes, here he has gone, looking indifferently up: "Oh, here are the nuts," eating a few while his thoughts had run away as a boy who couldn't be bothered with staying at home, but "killed time" somewhere or other in other fields. It makes no difference now. Here are all the happiest, immediate moments gathered together at the nut harvesting festivities; he stands in the middle of them thinking:

"I know what you want. You have come to say farewell. You surround me and gather all of life's nut-happiness here, where nuts were first revealed to me—because you know it is the last year I am allowed to see the hazel branches full of nuts.

"Never has life been as pleasant as now, and it has never before seemed so easy to leave."

October came and drew its sigh of remembrance, forgotten, sunk in itself, the sensible everyday economy; the fruit fell ripe in the grass, all the earth's colours went to dance in the woods, swooned under the dance and never rose again.

"I am like you," he thought, "just now life is at its best, just when it must stop. It is so full and rich there is no room for sorrow over one's death."

In the garden stood the apple trees which had given him of their rich gifts for as long as he could remember. The happy years he had lived under their branches all came together and rested with him in an eternal moment.

He stood under the little tree whose apples blushed deep into the core, and had the fragrance of all apples in them so that other apples were second to these from this tree which he had loved before any other and which was called "Little Hans' tree," and was tied to him in such a way that he felt his whole childhood life must be written somewhere within its bark. It was as if the tree suddenly made itself known to him, and he

understood that until now he had only understood a small part of it. But now he knew it entirely and said in his heart:

"The one that sees you as I see you now, sees the tree of life and will know he can never die."

A few days later he was sauntering over Peder Quiet's land. Peder was ploughing. Hans walked beside him watching the plough turn up the earth like a ripple of a smile.

Around Peder Quiet's mouth lay the same smile.

A good spirit was ploughing Peder's mind while he ploughed his field.

"What is it which makes one feel so good when one ploughs?" asked Hans.

Peder stopped the plough and thought a little:

"Well—I think it is because one gets so near to it all, and then of course there is the feeling of thankfulness."

"Because the land is yours?"

"That too, of course—but I meant because I am allowed to go on here working on the land."

He looked along the last furrow and added:

"It's not only that I am allowed to, but it is something I am supposed to do which makes it really complete."

He took his plough again and signalled the horses.

"Yes, what could be better,—both to want to and to have it." The smile came again on his face and on his earth.

Hans went over to Niels and said:

"Show me the farm, Niels!"

Niels showed him the stables and the different out-houses; he took him out to the fields and let him see them all, while they talked about the earth's many different bounties.

When they got back to the farmyard, Hans turned and looked again out over the fields.

"Yes," he said, "here it shall begin. It is a good place.—Take off your coat, Niels!"

Niels took off his coat, looking at Hans in surprise.

"Roll up your shirt sleeves!"

Niels rolled them up. Hans let his hand glide down over the arm's fine muscles.

"Your arms are strong and your eyes are good. You are a man."

He took out his gold watch, showed it to Niels, and said:

"My father bought this for me when I had passed my examination with honours and my picture was in the papers, I want to give it to you before I die."

"You have no reason to talk about dying now, you are as strong and healthy as the rest of us."

Hans answered:

"I want to stand here a moment and look at you, and that is going to belong to you; and I will give myself permission to envy you your broad shoulders and your strong chest, while I am enjoying your open mind. Come with me into your room. I want to talk to you, because you are the one who is to do the work for me."

When they had gone in, Niels said:

"You keep talking as if you were going to die, but you are sound and healthy."

"That is true," he answered, "but I have cut loose and it won't be long before my strength will give out and not be renewed."

"I would have liked to have lived, Niels, and worked together with you, and taken the leadership of the new parish. But it takes more strength than it is possible for me to bring into my life. The trouble is, Niels, people are careless with life's moments and forget their value, but for death they have respect. I will live awhile and the new life will be so strong in me you will all be able to see it. Then I shall die, so that you

can never forget it as long as you can remember me. Die before I have sinned against it, that is all I can manage.

"But you are to live the new life in my place and do my work for me."

"Do your work?" asked Niels. "How can I, I don't know what it is, or what you want—the moment I am with you I feel I have a vague understanding about what it is, but that is not really understanding; it's more likely a deep wish that you may succeed, because I would like to see the good work you want to do—done. But even if I understood you, I haven't your intelligence. I haven't the slightest idea what I would have to do."

"You don't have to worry about that," Hans replied. "It will all come out of your nature, all this which you still don't know. I will not explain nor tell you what you are to do. You will do it by yourself.

"But this I will say—not because I want you to understand, but because I want you to believe. There is a living substance—no—a living being all over the earth. The one who can become himself entirely, just this small thing—himself—the one who succeeds in removing every taught opinion and idea from himself and stands naked and alone in the middle of the universe—he will be penetrated and saturated with light from this being, and know it. It is in every living thing, and although the living don't know it, it lives by the strength of this being. And the one who is saturated with light from it, continues to be the same small limited 'me' he is, but in the penetration of the ever-present, he is himself penetrated into every living thing and person, is as one with them inside, without their knowing it, and is closer even than their own thoughts. He is as near as their involuntary perception of life—although he continues to be the one he is in all his limitations.

"It is really like this, although it is difficult to understand.

I am not saying it to explain something to you which can't be explained but only experienced. I'm telling you to reassure you, and it really will reassure you in spite of your—very sensible—doubt, because I don't only talk to you but influence you inside. You are confident."

"Yes," said Niels. "It's quite true, as long as I sit with you and hear you."

"That is because of the ever-present being—it pains me to use such a poor name for it—which has an ingenious and direct admission into your inmost perception of yourself. You are the only one of all the young people here who is susceptible to it. You are so susceptible that it is a wonder you don't know about it. You are the only one who—in spite of little knowledge and lack of understanding—can't help but believe in what I say, because your nature adopts it in itself, the source from which I speak. That is why you are the one who shall work instead of me. Don't speculate over how you are going to do it. You will do it as well as you can and according to your nature."—

That which later most surprised Niels about this conversation was that he, both while they were talking and a good while afterwards, forgot all about Hans' death which was the reason for their conversation, and seemed even more unreasonable than that which was said.

## *Chapter 24*

### HOLY LIFE

**I**T was about Christmas time that people began to notice a change. It came in a smile; his mother was the first to see it. They were singing the Christmas hymn, "A Child was born in Bethlehem," and every now and then he sang a line with them, but mostly he sat with that smile of remembrance which people sometimes have when they get news of something in which they took part. This smile they often saw later on. He went around looking as if he knew something pleasant. There flowed happiness and blessedness from him.

He had got a large, comfortable chair in his room; often his mother would open the door a wee bit and see him sitting there with closed eyes. He could sit like this for hours and she thought he was tired and was sleeping, but once when she happened to disturb him, he opened his eyes and looked at her.

She went pale, almost sinking on her knees. He got up and went over to her to help her.

To his father she said later:

"I woke the boy and he looked at me, and his eyes looked as if they came right from God himself."

To others she said nothing, but the servants carried tales: "One day I was going into his room to bring him some boiled milk; I opened the door carefully, because we all thought he sat sleeping mostly. But it isn't sleep, because when I opened the door I saw him sitting with open eyes. He didn't notice me even, so I went away again. There seemed to be something in the air which forbade me to enter—I felt I wasn't worthy."

The story about this maid who couldn't enter his room went its way around the parish so that people nodded and said:

"Yes, it's quite true; he is so good that it's really terrifying."

Some wanted to see him and sit by him, because there was light and peace around him; but most of them didn't like it, because there wasn't room enough in them for that which came forth from him. They became restless and shy; others kept away because they understood this unnatural goodness came from the fact he knew he was going to die, and they hadn't the courage to think about a death which was being met without fright.

They, who loved him, wanted to do him good, but felt he was already beyond their reach. There was never anything they could give which he needed.

One day in February his mother asked:

"Is there nothing you want, Hans?"

He then answered:

"Yes, there is one thing. I would rather not be washed away by the spring."

"Washed away?"

"When the spring comes it often takes the sick up by the roots, but I would like to be left standing a little longer. I would like to see another summer. I have so loved the sun and the green earth and the blue sky."

"What shall I do if you are called away?" she asked.

"I have to die sometime."

"Yes, but not before me," she cried. "I am your mother and you are my only child. I could not bear to lose you. I ought to die before you."

"Which is the worst?" he asked. "A mother loses her child, or a child loses his mother?"

"When the child is little, it is worse for the child," she an-

swered. "The mother is a grown person and must bear life's burden, but when the child is grown——"

"Each one has his fate and must bear it with happiness. We shan't wait long for each other if I go first, because you are older."

"Yes, we shall meet again," she said dutifully believing it, but getting no consolation from it. It needs more than ordinary beliefs to derive such from this sorrow.

Then spring came and he was allowed to live to see the summer. To the quarry he never returned for the hill was too high. He went into the field right outside the yard, the field in which he had seen the world disappear and return washed clean.

People knew he usually sat there under the hedge. Often they came in and sat with him awhile. Their eyes became deeper and clearer when they sat with him. He happened to think:

"Once I could only bear to see them at a distance. Now I see they are like the earth, the wet and cold changes to warmth and generosity when the sun comes. But it demands an enormous amount of sun of the person who wishes to make them good."

One day Karna came and sat with him.

"Now we all know you are soon leaving us," she said.

"Yes," he answered smiling, "the harvest festivities are soon over for me; it won't be long before I leave."

"Then it's about time I thanked you for the dance.—There's something I have wanted to ask you about for a long time—did you do it on purpose?"

"What?"

"The dance."

"Not at first," he said. "I only wanted to dance with you. Then I saw how beautifully you danced and I came again.

But that time, the first time we danced alone, when the others left the floor to watch—then I discovered who you were, where your strength lay and where your weakness, which was one and the same thing. I then decided to dance you free—you who came to us from the dance's heaven—and who now never has to fear about the dance's hell."

"You have saved me," she said, "but I have sinned against you."

"You? What sin have you done me? You have danced with me, and shown me a heaven I never knew existed. Is that what you call a sin?"

"I have wished you would call me—like so many others have," she murmured.

"I have often wished to call you," he answered.

She pressed her hand against her heart and was silent a long time.

"I will always thank God because you didn't do it, but I want to thank you because you thought of it. It will be a link which binds me to you, and I will never be able to go wrong again because you will pull the link and I will follow after you—far behind, but still following.

"Wherever you are all things become clean and to you everything can be said.

"I don't know if I'm sorry you are going to die; but I would have liked you to go on living, because you would always lead me. I know you would never again have any desire to call me, even if you became strong and healthy and lived for years."

"Thank you because you believe that," he said simply. "I want to die in the belief I could have managed to live."

"I don't understand why you mustn't live," she said.

"It is better for the others that I die," he answered.

"You love the others so much that you willingly give your life for them?" she asked.

"The chasm between them and me gets smaller every day. And still," he added a little later, "it's perhaps not right to say that I love the others. I love the life which is in us all, but I feel the expression it gets in people is so small."

"Isn't it odd, I understand you?" she said. "But that which was good in you was bad in me, because the chasm hasn't been wide enough for me."

"That's just why it will be easier for you, when you no longer need a chasm," he said. "When you once become clean and entirely sun there will no longer be a chasm between you and God. Much that is bad and should be avoided will some time become good and should be pursued. But if it is good or bad will be decided by our inmost self. And you will learn to take care of your fence, before you try to pull it down."

The same day Trine came and sat with him a long time; people who noticed it went by letting them sit undisturbed. Her face was peaceful like his, but the tears flowed freely. When he saw them, he said:

"You are wrong, Trine, when you sit here crying."

"I am not wrong, when I think we are to be parted. Every one says you yourself know you are going to die."

"What has that got to do with us, that I'm going to die?" he asked.

"It concerns me, that I shall continue to live," she answered.

"The difference is not as great as you think," he answered. "Why should we two weep, who have nothing to lose? The one of us has never come to the other for anything; we came simply because we were richer when we were two, and we can never be anything else. It was so good to see your fingers play, my own were made happy watching them. Between us the earth was made good to walk upon, because the other's feet touched the ground. And so it will continue to be for you,

you know it; your eyes weep, but way inside you are at peace."

"You mustn't forget I have loved you, the way I have seen you, your face, your hands and your fingers, which you spoke of; yes, I remember them ever since that time—we were digging in the grass back by the road. Now I see the change and know what it means. Do you think it so strange that I should weep?"

"That which you are speaking about is only something you have always seen together with me, something which belonged to me, and which you loved. Just as you would love a little dog which followed me around. If it became ill, you would feel bad, and the day it couldn't follow me around any more, you would cry over it. It doesn't seem strange to me that you weep, but doesn't it seem strange to you, that deep inside you are at peace?"

She looked up at him but said nothing. He could see on her face that she often had thought she wasn't upset enough about him.

"That is because we have never demanded anything from each other. The world has only become a better place because we have learned to know it together. We have given without wanting to: desire did not reach us."

She bent her head, looking down, and a faint blush came up in her cheeks. When he saw it he nodded and said tenderly:

"Yes, it is sad we should never experience each other completely; if we had been allowed to, it would have made it so much harder to part. Now there lies an innocent clearness around us, and parting will be as if I had died when I was young. And if you ever become mother to a little boy and see him playing with earth and stones and grass, you will remem-

ber us two, and you will live our childhood over again with him; you will play our make-believe games with him, and he will love his mother for them, and will give you your mind's innocence back 'newly washed.' ”

She thought about the dream which had been lying in her heart, and waiting to be born and to be given life. She saw herself standing beside him watching their little children playing with earth and stones and grass.

“This can never happen now,” she sighed, “and you must not speak about my being mother to anyone else's child.”

“I am glad you feel that way about it now, but it is necessary you should know I do not exact any such promise from you! But for the moment it makes me happy. Thank you for that and for all the other things. There has never come anything from you except that for which I must thank you.”

She began to weep terribly again. She sobbed:

“I can't understand how you can speak about your death so quietly. It is as if it no longer concerned me.”

The same light which had so frightened his mother, came into his eyes, and he said: “That is because it has in a way already happened.” As he stood up he continued:

“I have given God all my moments, and in a way I don't exist any longer. I stand here, but I am really everywhere—and those who are like me notice that I touch them, wherever they are.”

“Are there more like you?” she asked.

“Yes, there are more of us,” he answered. “Like the others I have given to God every inch of the little garden which was mine, and in return He has done away with all distances.”

He took her arm, leaning on her, while they walked back into the garden.

“The fog has gone and I walk almost entirely in the garden of paradise. I can see how close to it you are—right on the

other side of the hedge—at the back of the gooseberry bush with the ‘heavenly berries.’”

His smile was so catching she had to smile with him, while he added:

“That is why you can’t feel as sad as you think you should. It’s not because you don’t love me enough but because you are so near to me. I can never leave you entirely——”——

It was a day in June, and the fields were green with the fertility which gives pleasure to the farmers’ eyes; the garden was full of the perfume of roses. He was standing with his mother in all this richness of life. A long time he stood looking between the garden trees out over the fields so rich with grain. She was surprised he could stand up so long, he who always kept to his bed now. But he continued standing and looking.

“Holy life!” he murmured, closing his eyes as if the earth were too good to look upon.

She felt she must help him in again. The next day he kept his bed, and he never got up again. He didn’t speak to them, but smiled whenever they spoke.

One mid-day Trine and both his parents were in his room with him. He lay looking pleased from one to the other. Suddenly he took his eyes from them and looked—“out into the everywhere,” said his mother later. They saw his lips begin to move and were about to go nearer to listen, but his voice came plainly and clearly:

“Holy life!”

The terrible cough came, and while they wiped away the blood from his mouth, he died.

## *Chapter 25*

### RESIGNATION

THE farm is sold and Kristian Nymand has moved in. Now they live in a house which is so new and "modern" and ugly everyone respectfully calls it the "Villa." The furniture has been bought in Copenhagen, and is made to stand and look new in a "villa" but not for ordinary use.

There they go, strangers to themselves the whole day. The father leaves his wooden shoes outside when he walks into this splendid emptiness. He gets along better because he goes about doing odd little jobs over at Peder Quiet's. It happened Peder Quiet one day asked for a little help, and it felt so good to be doing something on a farm again, he continued to go over every morning to hear if he could help in any way. In the meantime the mother goes cleaning and polishing at home in the "Villa" so that everything shall be kept as new. She understood too, it was good for him to work over at Peder Quiet's. But good God, he was nothing but a labourer on another man's farm! Thank goodness he wouldn't receive any wages. He didn't need to, he worked for friendship's sake and for his own amusement, while she polishes on, and struggles to keep the new house brilliantly new and unhome-like.

One can't live long on people coming in from inquisitiveness and admiration: "How lovely it is here; it's too fine to live in!" One day this remark becomes a burning truth which must be hidden. The envious remark: "Yes, you can do these things, with all your money in the bank," soon loses its nourishing value.

The only time she is happy are the two hours at church on

Sundays. Then she feels at home, because the church is the same old good place it has always been. And when the parson preaches about God, she knows she believes. Out in the earth around the church lie all the dead. Eternity, that anxious emptiness, is much more living and confidential than the "Villa."

There in the cemetery is Hans' grave, but she has wept so much over it she has no more tears. It doesn't give her new life, but more anxieties, and she must go to the vicarage. When she comes home she says to the father:

"The parson thinks it."

"What?"

"That he died in the truth."

The father turned his head away, and answered avoidingly:

"Why shouldn't he?"

He would rather not talk about such things. His experience is that the less you think about believing, the easier it will be to die in belief. It would be rather a safe thing to do, if possible, when the time came. But then one should try not to think about such things too much. He has thought a good deal in his time. It was certainly from him the boy got his good head—but the weak lungs from her. He has followed politics and read his paper, and it has long been clear that those who understood such things no longer believed in God, or life after death. "Intelligentsia" has done away with the old belief and the little doses of the daily paper had, after a while, undermined all belief about such things for ordinary people as well, who, you couldn't say belonged to the "Intelligentsia" but at least to the class just below—"the enlightened."

For that matter one could also form one's own thoughts. He has mixed with his animals as much as with people and hasn't he been just as good friends with his horse as with the parish people? Haven't the horses shown just as much difference in character as people in the parish, and if compliments had to be

given to either one or the other, then the horses were more to be relied upon than people. They at least were not deceitful. But when a horse died, did it enter anyone's mind that it might awaken from the dead and live on? No, it was dead of course. Why should there be any difference between the horses and the humans? Yes, we have read and learned—but we have read and learned so much which we find afterwards is all wrong. Once in the paper it had said quite definitely that a certain sort of oil-cake was very good for the cows—but it was only another disappointment. One waited and was so sure that when a certain party came into power, everything would be different—there was another disappointment. And now we think we don't want to die, and we expect the soul to come into its own and the body fall away—that will be another disappointment. It's better not to think about such things. Die, we have to do, and it's better to slip into death without having said too much.

She talks more and more about it until at last she won't be able to talk about anything else. She cleans her house, and she cleans her soul, so there isn't much cosiness in either one; but over at Peder Quiet's he can hear the horses calling, feel the soft noses on his face, and smell the stables. They know him already; it is such a release when they whinny and he goes in to them.

A Pharisee she will never be, because she is a mother and is more anxious about her son's redemption than her own. She goes around trying to visualise our Lord, and when she sees Him really clearly in her mind, she prays to "Him" as she calls it. Once in a while the miracle happens which happens to so many who kneel in prayer to their own images; that there from the crude earth of existence flows a real force-stream by the image's screen, and actually enters the heart of the one in prayer. She then knows her prayers have been heard,

and she believes even more strongly in the image of our Lord she has created in her own imagination.

But usually when she has communion with this image and the dry heart which such a prayer creates in the mind, her only benefit lies in her good conscience, in the fact that "she has prayed for Hans again."

Bodily she seems a bit smaller after this dry glow in her mind, for she has used vitality instead of receiving it, and she is drying up.

One day the father notices it.

"She looks like Andersine!" he thought.

What had happened to Andersine? He was newly confirmed when he knew Andersine, but suddenly he remembers quite plainly. Yes, Andersine was so beautiful and got married, and had a child—boy or girl he couldn't remember—but then something happened and they became very poor, and Andersine kept on giving her child the breast an indecently long time in order to economise. It ruined her. The doctor said her health was ruined. She had given the breast too long and it had weakened her; she would never get over it.

Andersine began to look haggard and dried up; everyone could see it. But then—then, she was suddenly nowhere in his mind; she must have died around about the time he was confirmed or a little after.

He glanced often at the mother. Was it possible she was also on the way——! He went over to Peder Quiet's horses.

If it had happened while they were at home at the farm it would have been a terrible thing. The thought alone would have been dreadful.

Wouldn't he feel sorry if she died now? "Ye-es, of course I would." His own voice said this smoothly and clearly somewhere in his own head—but just as one says something respectable to a stranger. It was clear that death was unpleasant.

He knew it would have to happen. Would he rather it happened one day while he was in the stable with the horses, so that it was "over" when he came home?—and rather that the neighbour's wife had dropped in, and she came over to tell him she had already dressed her—and all the rest of it.

Those two, who had, as well as they could, shared everything together when they had the boy and the farm, had not been let into sorrow and emptiness—together.

So they went about in the "Villa" by each other's sides with faces turned away.

Those who saw them could easily believe they looked like two little wrinkled apples, who had been left hanging for no reason away into November, because no one bothered about them, and because the weather hadn't shaken them down to the wet earth. He could ask himself why they hadn't been blown away in the spring while they were blossoms; why they had been allowed to become fruit and ripen and left to hang there, useless and forgotten.

## Chapter 26

### TRINE

HER life can be told in a few words. Many would consider it was poor and without interest. Some would perhaps remember a feeling which lay in the mind from their very early beginning, but had later disappeared in the day's hustle. There are some who one early morning had a visit from our God and awakened in the moment He was leaving, just in time to see a little bit of His raiment, but not His face, because the eye hung on to the richness and loveliness of His holy attire. Currants and gooseberry bushes in their full outflowing of morning light, green fruit trees, dressed in white like young girls at their confirmation, and the beech tree, which has truly sprung out on this morning. God was in the room and kissed a sleeping child. The beech tree saw it through the window and was so pleased it burst all its buds.

What a day! Any amount of good things might happen on a day like this; one notices oneself how good one can feel before evening. Hours come, many and long and the sun begins to burn; the blood gets warmer: perhaps one is suddenly naughty; a long, long time goes by, the afternoon becomes cloudy and one is cold in the shade. There is something happening constantly, every once in a while something unpleasant, perhaps even sad. One is depressed and tired when evening comes and goes to bed with a tear in one's eyes for the sad thing which has happened. If one could only fall asleep quickly and forget. Sleep comes nearer; its forerunner has shown itself already; colourful pictures without order or composition. Now something arrives which sweeps everything else away. Is

it sleep itself? No, it is the clear awakening from this morning who has come to say good-night; a bit of our Lord's raiment is there again and dries away any tears from the eyes. Our Lord's prayer comes softly on its stockinged feet, and takes one under the arm. In a moment one will see His face and feel His presence—He who watches while one sleeps.

Perhaps there are not many who remember these mornings. Time is poor in pleasures although rich in amusement; necessary readiness ousts the immediate existence, the contents of life become something which can be counted like money.

Trine's first impression was a morning like this when she woke up just at the moment our Lord went back into heaven again. The light from His eyes still lingered on all things, when she came out and noticed everything was good friends with her—especially the gooseberry bush in the hedge stood there all lighted up by God.

One day she discovered a little light-haired boy and found to her joy there was another in the world like herself. She had seen other girls and boys, but they were strange, amusing or naughty; they saw her and talked to her from the outside; but this little boy was both outside her and in her, and it was suddenly such pleasure to be herself.

Things became worn, they lost their newness and were always in one's everyday eye. The gooseberry bush, too; she had already forgotten how it looked when it was new.

Then there came a foggy morning when everything disappeared and when the fog arose the boy stood on the other side of the gooseberry bush telling her it had been newly washed, and she could see it.

Nothing else happened in her life.

She went to school with him. He was always both inside and outside her—a time came when he wasn't outside her any longer; she never saw him and didn't know if they were en-

gaged, or if she was just going along hoping they were, because he was still in her.

He came again, and they belonged to each other, and the clearness of morning lay around them.

She remained in it all her life. The conditions in her mind which she was constantly experiencing, and which others, if she had tried to explain to them about it, would have called highly sensitive and overstrung, were for her the very clear, ordinary truths, like the garden and the house where she lived. She was a morning's wide awake child: Sentimental night dreams never touched her.

His last day of life she spent with him and his parents. He lay looking from one to another and she saw the connection in his glance, when, on its wandering, it reached her.

When he at last took his eyes from her and lay there "looking into the everywhere," her whole being refused to be closed away outside from anything which was his. Used as she was to see life through his eyes, she looked into his eyes then, to see mirrored in them the world he was looking at, but only when he said his last words could she see properly. She saw the words he said, not as one sees words written before one in the air, but she saw that which called forth these words in him, that which he with these words tried to express. She has since quietly but definitely explained that in that morning she saw the sound of his voice just as much as she heard it. There was suddenly a clearness about her; it forced its way into her and lighted up every inmost corner, so that she, in a way, understood everything about life and about herself. She felt this clearness would never pass.

In the meantime the others were crying and said he was dead. She didn't understand the word; it had lost its meaning for her.

They led her out of the room, but she continued to be in

life's wonderful clear obviousness, the one to which he had given the name "Holy life."

The others, back there in the fog, talked about death and funerals. She understood them, as one understands a word now and then in some foreign language without being able to grasp the meaning of the conversation.

She put her black mourning clothes on when the funeral day came, but only on account of the country's rules of etiquette, and she walked quietly over to his home.

When she saw the coffin, it suddenly dawned on her that in it lay "that which she had always seen together with him" and which she had loved, and made as one with him. The fog sank over her as well, and surrounded her thickly and coldly; she left the funeral and went home to her room—not yet in sorrow, but like one who has been struck paralysed by a fall, and can neither feel nor think. Deep, deep in her there still remained a small square of that natural clearness alive only enough to keep her together in her work.

No one saw her cry, but one noticed she walked in such a peculiar, mechanical way, and with an absolutely wooden face.

Niels' father, who possessed that fine and sensitive feeling, which once in a while one finds in quiet, righteous peasants, said one day to his wife:

"I wonder if Trine is slowly going insane?"

"But, man!" said his wife, "she does her work just as well as we others do. She has her sorrow, but she works sensibly and clearly."

"I don't know," he said, "there is something queer about her; her clothes don't seem to fit."

"She is always very neat and clean in her attire," interrupted his wife.

"I know it," he answered, "that's just the thing which makes it so unpleasant, that I, in spite of this, feel as if she had put them on back to front."

One day when they were standing together in the yard, Trine passed them on the way to the pump to fetch water. He whispered to his wife:

"See! One could think she was walking in her sleep. She walks around as if there were no soul in her."

Trine heard it, turned to them, and explained kindly:

"No, that's quite wrong, because I'm only soul and haven't found my body yet. That's why I'm not entirely here, but walk around amongst you in this manner."

The wife stepped forward and took her by the arm.

"Trine!" she said.

"You mustn't be frightened," said Trine. "It's quite natural that you should misunderstand. I thought myself, when I had seen his coffin, I was dead and no longer had a body—but it's not like that; it's like this—this is the way——"

She stared emptily into the air, and shook her head helplessly. Her mistress said to her:

"Wouldn't you like to visit your parents. It's Saturday to-day, and you can stay at home until Monday."

Trine put down her bucket and went, while she tried to make things clear in her own mind, and now when she has no longer anyone to talk to, it seems easier. She goes along seeing just how things are, and she can't understand why the others can't understand it—but it is of course, because they have already got their feet on the earth, and can't remember how things were before.

It's quite simple now; she is somewhere far away from here—as one is, when one is not yet born. In a world, deep, deep in her soul, she can see far out—or deep down. In a way it's the same thing and she can see the whole parish as if through smoke. She knows very well, out there—or down there, she will have to go sometime; she is already on her way there.

She goes on and on along a road she knows very well—because it lies in herself; she is really going out of herself and

down into something heavy and hard and difficult, which lies waiting for her. She doesn't go this way because she wants to, but because she must, and because she wants to do what she must.

Suddenly she feels something: a hot wave of anxiety.

There stands the house!

She leans with her hand on the gate and understands that this house is the gateway into the world. Here she will enter like a little child and weep, and when she has wept a long time, she will be amongst people again and be like them.

She walks in, and with her first word come the tears:

"Mother!"

—Sunday morning. The sun is shining; she walks out and suddenly finds herself under the cherry tree in front of the little flower beds—and over there the old beehives!

All these things are old friends, as if she had herself carried them in her. Now they stand here, as if they were saying: "We followed you down to earth so that you could continue to be with us."

On the tank by the road stands a willow tree and a little further on a gooseberry bush, which seems to become more and more alive, with a memory as though human. At last she understands what it is saying:

"Here you are to stay and live!"

She nods. It is decided.

She learns to sew, and lives at home. The epidemic of influenza comes and takes away both her parents.

Again death passes very near her, but it doesn't have much effect on her; it belongs to life, and it seems as if she is used to it.

Here in this place she is once more at home in the world; but the fog never settles down on it; there is a difference between before and now.

Before the years were laid one on the lap of the other and later they were worn out, until at last the first ones couldn't be seen any longer. It was like the growth of the soil; it was harvested but in the barns, threshed and made into food, until at last it had disappeared and was forgotten and a new growth came.

The years were lived, became experience and lay in the heap of remembrance. New years came, were laid on top and pressed the others down under the soil of forgetfulness.

So it was.

Now every year's crop is itself and all other years' crops together. The year no longer says "I," but "we," because it has all the other years' souls alive in itself. Every day comes to her as all other days, held by the hand as by a good father who has his whole family with him. If she goes out she is Trine who sews for people, or Trine who goes to school, or Trine who works for Niels' mother. All her different ages are present.

At times it happens that something outside herself can press eternity into a short space of time. Together with young boys and girls she can suddenly become a Trine in her twenties and looks much younger. Then life is made up of small bits, as the year of years; she is now in her youth and many fall in love with her, and life is wonderful.

But when she comes home and is alone, she again has no certain age, but, as if by magic, an age she likes.

The young men only see the Trine they are in love with and they propose to her. She shakes her lovely head and suddenly they see her as she is; the little Trine from school; Trine from Niels' farm, and Trine the seamstress, who stands before them shaking her lovely head. They can't understand her, but they do understand they can't get her.

The young girls come to her to get their new clothes, also

often during their free time, because it is so nice to talk to her. Wonderfully clean of mind they go away from her, as if they weren't older than their first school year. A light from her eyes shines in theirs; when the young men see it they feel they love; they propose and get "yes."

But love's goddess, Trine, who spiritualises them all, sits alone with her machine. Once in a while she feels both her loneliness and her youth. The sewing machine stops, her eyes look into the future and Trine, who is in her twenties but looks younger, looks for a moment like a seamstress who is already in her thirties.

In a moment like this Niels comes. She wakes up and almost becomes the Trine she really is, and whom he loves. But he has seen the old maid expression which will come one day, and he understands that the time has come to speak.

He says what she has known for many years. And which she in this moment is glad to hear. In reality it is not necessary to answer. She feels like asking questions,—if he didn't know there were many who had proposed?—Yes—If he hadn't been frightened she would say "yes" to one of the many? Her eyes weren't even twenty: they were full of mischief—No, he had never been frightened of that—Was he sure he had any chance?—Yes, he was sure there couldn't be any thought of any of the others; but he wasn't sure he stood much chance—So that was why he had waited until she was almost an old maid?

"Yes," said Niels seriously. "I knew a certain amount of time would have to elapse, Trine."

Her face changed expression again, and her words came slowly:

"You must wait a little longer, Niels, until I have had time to think."

"Have you never thought about it?"

"Yes," she answered, "but never as anything real, just as a thought."

When Niels had left she leaned her head against the table and cried. It comes suddenly and unexpectedly for her; the depth from which the tears rise she has never fathomed, hardly ever thought of. They came from a want of life which had never got its real answer. The one she had loved, had loved her in return; but that desire one gets which makes one lower one's eyes in an ecstasy of intoxication and anxiety, she had never met in him. He probably had it in him; there must have been others who could wake it; when he was with her it went into the eternal love he had for her, it had no separate life, and at that time she had never felt it as a loss. But now the world revenged itself on her and made her weep bitterly for a long time.

When she finally looked up she felt helpless towards life.

She then remembers Niels' good face, the light smile, when he swung her up on the hay cart—he was terribly strong—his happy talk when he walked with her to church, and his flushed face at the harvest dances.

One must look at life as it is and get the best possible out of it. She knew "yes" was in her eyes when he proposed, and all the time she teased him.

She goes out to "think it over as something real." There is spring sunshine outside.

Here is the grass bank and there stands the gooseberry bush with the heavenly berries. The mild spring feeling comes to her from the soft earth, and remembrance of her childhood's games comes in waves from the damp earth.

"And if you sometime become the mother of a little boy, and you see him playing with the earth and stones and grass, you will remember us two and you will live your childhood again, and you will play our make-believe games with him, and he

will love his mother for them and give you back your mind's innocence, heaven-marked."

Mother! Yes, it would be a living life; see small fingers dig in the earth, live it all over again, and try to be a young young woman. She wasn't allowed to be it when she most wanted to. Be young awhile and afterwards live the beginning over again with her own child. All the make-believe games and the holy ones too.

Slowly she walks towards the little glade near the house—there, where God gave them the blue sky to play with.

If she could live to sit here with her little boy, with clear eyes and newly made innocent phantasies!

She can, I suppose, be happy in her own way; but sadness will force its way through all her happiness; it won't be real happiness, it will only look like it; but she can surely be thankful because it resembles happiness.

She sits looking at the sun spots at her feet; it reminds her of a glance which was all sun. At last she sees nothing but the sun spot, which is neither little nor big, but draws the whole world to itself and becomes everything—all. She becomes one with it; its light is in her eyes and over her face.

She goes home and gets a rake; she walks in a deep trance and her actions come out of it, without knowing or having to know clearly what she wants.

She goes to the cemetery and clears up around her parents' graves. She stands there a moment quietly, smiles and blushes as she did that time when he came walking towards her, and they walked home together without saying a word and were engaged just the same.

She's not standing there knowingly remembering. It isn't a time in the past; it is still happening. Silently and happily she walks away from the graves, as she did once before, long ago.

There is another which must be decorated. It is his grave, but it seems to her as if they walk towards it together.

His grave lies there bathed in sunlight; that is as it should be. In her mind she says to him: "This is most certainly the place where all your oranges have been lying."

There she stands leaning against the rake. Somewhere far away lies the fact that it is the first time she is standing by this grave, because she never before dared to face it. She smiles over her whole face. In there, deep inside herself where she talks to him, she hears again his last glad words, "Holy life!" Hears and sees them again clearly. The clearness is in her, around her, and falls athwart the cross which bears the dates of his birth and death. She then understands that these words don't mean the beginning and the end: In fact they have nothing to do with time; they mean a place, the place where he and she were to stand together and know something.

He had very soon seen what he should have to do, so there was no more work for him in this place. Then the other date was put down. She needed more room, was a little more stupid, so needed more time, so the dates for her would be farther apart. And when she died there would be no partition between them. That was the reason she still went about here on earth; this she had to experience before the last date was written. This was what she was to live for.

She stood a long time in happy thought, of when the completeness of their union was to be. There was suddenly a step on the gravel. Karna stood outside the fence, glanced quickly over the cross with its name and dates, looked back to Trine and said seriously:

"Will you teach me to sew?"

As if it were the most ordinary question which could be asked at this spot, Trine answered:

"Yes, of course, with pleasure."

## Chapter 27

### THE FIVE PLACES

SOME men were walking seriously along the road toward the school house. It is the day of the parish election. Another man comes out of a gate and joins the rest.

"Whom are we going to have as Mayor?"

"Some one from one of the five places, I suppose."

"Naturally, but whom?"

"The one they choose, I suppose."

Nothing more is said about it then. But every time a new man joins the others the same question is asked:

"Who will it be to-day?"

"Well, it will have to be someone from one of the five places."

When finally someone asks: "Why is it necessary to have one from one of the five places?" the answer comes a bit slowly: "Well—they are young and good workers and know what they are doing."

There is a certain respect for the five places; perhaps it doesn't go any deeper than Maren Nymand's kindness; but it is the most they can manage.

With Maren Nymand's kindness goes a story.

Hans Larsen got honours, was written about and had his picture in the papers, died and was buried, while her own son, Kristian, failed in his examinations, but still lives, and is now the owner of Hans' farm. It is really a wonderful feeling and must be aired:

"You see it turned out you were to have the good farm after all, Kristian!"

He answered: "Yes, it did; but I would gladly have given it up, if he could have lived."

If a poor devil is good, well—one doesn't count that—the most one can say about him is, he justifies his existence—but if it is a person who knows his profession, and can run the farm better than most could, who doesn't really have to be good in order to win one's respect, if he is really good we take off our hats to his goodness, because such a man is as great an asset as to own a car.

Maren knew; her own son was just such a man, and she was proud and decided he must take after her, so when she met the poor Marie Boels, she said:

"Come in and get some milk for your pail, Marie!"

"Thank you," said Marie, "you are good to poor people."

"Yes—why not—we can afford it," answered Maren. "Come again another time and get some more."

Kristian's farm was one of the five places. The others were the houses of: Albert, the wooden shoe maker; Karl Jensen's *boels-sted*; Anton Eriksen's, and Niels Nielsen's farms.

The five places' greatness has grown up in spiritual poverty; and it was Niels who was the real owner of this poverty. He sat there with Hans' watch and a duty to perform which his friend had chosen as his life's work; but Niels had not understood what it meant. It seemed to him so vague: A new parish, which in a way was the old one; a new religion, which was to be on peaceful terms with the old one we always had had.

It wasn't Hans' thoughts, but his own which flowed out from his being and which had taken Niels and forced their way into him so that he couldn't pull himself free from them. They had gone into him and would not give him peace, if he didn't turn them into some definite work.

So he put on his intelligence's finest uniform and held parade over his spiritual troops; they came quickly, both from

the high school, paper-reading, and the parish library—but it turned out that either they were unfit, all of them, or he must be a very bad general. All knowledge he had acquired was sterile. He owned it as one can own furniture; it was nothing more nor less than information, without the gift of growth.

He put it all aside, he felt like a man who is dreaming. He is walking around without anything but his shirt to cover his body.

In such a mood he sat in his room one day and knew he was a very small person. He answered to the name of Niels Nielsen and nothing more could be said about him—a name and an answer to it, just like his horse and his dog; he was certainly not made to be a great reformer!

He might have known it before; he had gone through the same at high school. He had gone to it as one who has a call; but it soon showed he was nothing but a dead-brained peasant, who slept during lessons and doped his conscience and shamefulness by reading poetry, especially Shakespeare, upon whom he accidentally stumbled. All Shakespeare's people talked to him, showed him a confidence whose depth he, of course, could not see. They came to him when he felt small and untalented in comparison with his quicker-witted comrades. There was some help in these, but not enough, because they were not in reality people like himself. They were Shakespeare himself, and he was in a way much too big for the peasant Niels Nielsen.

Then it had happened, on just such a depressing and naked day as to-day. He had come to think some of these people had been real just like himself and he must surely be able to find out how they had been before they passed through the genius of Shakespeare. One of his comrades was mad about history, so to him he went and asked: "Do you know anything about the history of England?" The friend flew up and pointed at

his book-shelves, but Niels, who hated lessons on history, hurried to stop his friend saying: "Thank you, I only wanted to know a little about Shakespeare."

"He lived during the reign of Elizabeth," said his friend, as if at an examination.

"But all these Henrys and Richards surely must have lived at one time," said Niels, opening his documents.

The other looked into them and sat down, saying: "Well I never!"—forgetting Niels. When he finally put down the books he gave a long lecture on Henry and Richard, and Niels went into himself in company with people who really had lived, and his friend kept Shakespeare to see "what kind of poetical nonsense a poet could write about such historical persons."

Several days later he came to Niels and asked: "Have you anything more of Shakespeare's. I thought I understood my history, but since I have read Shakespeare—I mean the life in history has just been revealed to me. Have you any more of him?"

It was the beginning of a wonderful time when they talked history and literature. It wasn't only Shakespeare, for the friend and Niels weren't satisfied with only Henrys and Richards, but found themselves suddenly wide awake and interested in history lessons.

He sat remembering all this for a long time until suddenly his feet started him towards Kristian Nymand's house. "Tell me," he said, "—mathematics—?"

He knew Kristian had a passion for mathematics; it was the only thing he could learn at the Latin School.

"Mathematics," asked Kristian, looking almost beautiful. "Well, you see——"

As the peasant he was he soon came down to Niels' level and he told and explained, as only a person can who has opened his life's treasure chest for you. The door to a new world

began to open a wee bit for Niels; he came again another time. Suddenly Kristian mentioned the Pythagorean rule for learning.

"Pythagoras," exclaimed Niels.

"Yes, who was an old Greek who lived goodness knows when," answered Kristian.

"He lived in six hundred B. C.," said Niels, his love of history suddenly awakened, and he spoke about Pythagoras. "It's funny, isn't it. I never had any feeling that he was also a mathematician."

"It's not so funny," answered Kristian. "I have never been able to care a snap for history, but now you sit here telling me all this I can't understand why I didn't take to it at school when I should have done. Let's talk about these things once in a while."

This was the beginning of the five places.

The next step was made one Sunday when Niels had gone to the quarry to think about Hans. At the bottom stood Anton Eriksen, looking at a brown stone with flat sides and light square spots. Every once in a while he let his fingers glide along some ridges which lay deep in the stone.

"This is a Norseman," he said when Niels came down to him, looking very surprised. "They call it a pumice—yes, he has travelled all the way down here from Oslofjord."

"That stone?" asked Niels.

"Yes—it comes from the ice age. Here where we are standing was one solid bit of ice reaching all the way down into Germany and all the way up to Norway. All this we are standing in now, all this gravel and stone is what is called the *moraine* from the ice age. In fact we are standing in Norway really, because all this is stone and gravel which has been peeled off Norway. It hasn't been an easy parting. Look, you

can see the ridges in this pumice here—this is a letter describing a voyage from Norway.”

“Where have you learned all this?” asked Niels.

“An article in a paper started it,” said Anton. “I was interested so got myself a lot of literature about it. It’s fun, knowing how it all was made.” He stood there chuckling. “It’s really odd to think about: Old Norway scratching her back with a bit of ice, throws the ice and the scrapings in the gutter—where they lay and gradually become Denmark, and now look quite lovely.”

“Yes, but the ice?” asked Niels standing there in the middle of a Danish summer.

“Well, it melted—several thousand years went to the process. There wasn’t such a rush in those days like there is in ours, now. Then there grew up forests and lots of wild animals. There are supposed to have been elephants up here even——”

“Elephants!”

“Yes—but Sweden didn’t want to be left by Norway so in another few thousand years a new provision of ice arrived. The rest of it at present lies up there—the sand and gravel with the round, smooth stones. The big rock up there is a Swede. There is a very close relationship between Norway, Sweden and Denmark.”

“Well,” said Niels, taking up the pumice in great respect. “This must be pretty old.”

“Yes, it is a long time since it had its childhood and was lava,” answered Anton. “I should say it ought to be about 700 million years. But it has never met a human before to-day. You and I are the first to see it because I have just dug it out.”

“Come over to Kristian Nymand’s with me, to-night,” asked Niels.

He left a few minutes later. To-night he would hear some more; just now he wanted to be alone. He was seeing sights.

This solid earth had suddenly become alive and movable. It was as if it wanted to tell him something; at last he heard the word in himself: Creation. It was still going on. God was still working with it, and he, Niels Nielsen went here walking in the midst of it, and was part of it, and was himself in the process of being created into a new calling.—

The years had passed by, and Albert the wooden-shoe maker, who read Art books and was himself a bit of an artist, had also become one of the clique. Later came Karl Jensen who had taken up Natural Philosophy. The rest had come by itself.

It was queer how everything hung together and one subject carried them over into the other. Before they knew where they were they were paying regular visits to the Latin school and having private lessons from the masters. Kristian Nymand, who had failed so miserably at the same school before, was the cause of the teacher of mathematics having to do extra studies to keep a neck ahead of the young farmer. All their free time was spent in mutually educating each other, and it wasn't only surface knowledge. They went right to the bottom of it, and the five places would soon be seven. Henrik Pedersen and Klaus Lange were getting their own farms and houses.

At first all the people shrugged their shoulders at them, but later respect had come.

They respected Niels too; he was a bit embarrassed by it for of course he was one of them, but only a listener; each of the others had in a way almost a professorship in what had now almost become the parish University.

Niels was the only one who hadn't specialised. Albert, the wooden-shoe maker, who was full of enthusiasm and fire, had, besides Art history taken Art literature as well under his wing and the young Klaus Lange had competed with him in history. Not that they were trying to get ahead of each other. No,

it had happened quite naturally. Niels had handed over his favourite studies to them saying they were much better at it than he was.

But he was happy because he was allowed to belong. They never let him understand he did nothing or that they knew more than he. This he thought was cultivation, if anything could be called cultivation, spiritually cultivated heart-felt cultivation or whatever you cared to call it. As the wooden-shoe maker couldn't afford to buy many books and Henrik Pederesen could pay for the lessons in all the different languages he was mad about—what could be more beautiful than the obviousness with which the others shared the expenses, and refused all thanks. "Why the devil think about it, it's our own selves we are helping?" said Anton.

The most wonderful of all was the way they treated him as one of themselves, although he had nothing which was any good to them. If he had only dared to be wholly confidential with them; but the smallness which was himself he didn't dare to hand over to them. He felt that if he did they would lose all respect for him.

Once he had felt a call, in all simplicity, to life. He went to high school—and found himself impossible, but the "call" continued to be in him, and when he, in the beginning, talked literature and history with the four others he believed in himself, but then along came Albert and Klaus and took his belief away from him. In geology which he had brought in, through Anton, he followed more poorly every day—worse than any of the others. He didn't learn any of it, but just became interested in the bigness and wonder of it, the greatness of "Creation." The word took him and held him. He could feel creation; it was going on in himself and when he didn't think sensibly it was natural for him that his life's deeds were to create. That was his call.

But what in the name of heaven could he, with so little talent, create? The minute he began to think, he admitted his foolishness.

He felt he didn't deserve the share in the respect which was given "the five" and that was why he was glad the red cow was calving to-day, so that he had an excuse for being away from the parish election. He knew very well some of "the five" would be elected, and he would have to sit there and be reckoned with, just because they were called "the five." He didn't want that to happen.

He walked over to the red cow in the stable, who was lying there waiting to give birth to her first calf. What eyes she had! "If I could only understand her entirely—the way I feel for her," he thought—"and be able to say it—I would then understand everything—and could say it." The others could always express themselves, he could only sit and look at the red cow. Shakespeare—yes, heaven forgive him, he had the same feeling for the red cow as he had for all of Shakespeare, the wonder, the feeling and lack of brains to get to the depth of it all—and always faith. The red cow stood even nearer to him and he had more love for it than for Shakespeare, because she was living and no genius, only one of our fellow creatures in the middle of the great mysterious pain and joy, pregnant with a calf she did not know, like himself with a "call" he could not find.

The cow got her calf and licked it. What eyes! A world of knowledge in them! Yes, the red one had surely not figured out the great mystery, but she had experienced it. The loving wisdom's depth lay in its good eyes.

People came in through the door; it was the other four; so the election was over.

"Congratulations," they all said.

"Yes, thank you," said Niels. "It's a nice little calf."

"Oh, so you have a new calf too," they laughed. "All right, congratulations on that also."

"What do you mean—also?"

"We congratulate you on the dignity of being leader in the parish council."

He didn't say a word, but stopped dead.

"You stand there looking like an inmate of the poor house," said Kristian.

"What is this nonsense you're talking?" asked Niels.

"We say you have been chosen as leader of the parish council and must stand us all coffee and cigars at once," answered Albert.

Niels didn't move an inch.

"Let's go in and order coffee," said Anton, "he will come along then."

"Yes, but—I wasn't even over there," said Niels, as he dragged along behind them.

"That didn't matter," said Kristian. "You wouldn't have voted for yourself, anyway."

"No, I should say not, but how did it happen, anyway?"

"They wanted one of 'the five' so we proposed you."

"Yes, but I don't really belong. It's you four who are 'the five.'"

Albert, the wooden-shoe maker, laughed.

"It's you that makes the shoe," said the wooden sole to the heel, 'the toe, the heel and the over leather. I don't belong.'"

"Yes," said Kristian. "It can also be explained in another way. It wasn't you we elected; it was Hans. I have often thought about him at our meetings. I was with him at the Latin school and envied him because I could only keep up with him in Mathematics, and he could do everything. I couldn't get over the idea of being made to learn. Now I follow it all with pleasure and ease—like you others and I have often

thought that all together we make Hans, who learned everything with joy and ease. And when I saw the respect all those people had when they chose, they didn't say Anton or me, they demanded one of 'the five' and it seemed to me they wanted Hans, so I said, 'Niels!' because you are the one who was closest to him and it's through you we five—or rather we seven now—are, if I may say so, Hans."

Something seemed to loosen in Niels, an internal movement; clearness and faintness came over him at the same time. The "call" was about to take form and life.

"Dear friends," he said. "I have just watched a cow give birth to her first calf—no, you can't understand what I mean—that isn't what I mean—you mustn't think it is this result of the election which has moved me so; it's something I am on the point of understanding but haven't quite got the courage to believe. I have never understood it, but I must tell it to you after what Kristian has said about Hans.

"He talked to me as if it were a decided thing that I—I can't even stand here and say it—but it was the work he left, which should be done. And he came in to my field, and wanted to see my farm and said: 'This is good; this is where it shall begin,' and he wanted to see my arms, and he wanted to give me his gold watch, and I was to accomplish—no—I must tell you about the last day I talked with him. You must take it as it comes, I can remember it because I wrote it down when I got home, and have often sat reading it and heard his voice and seen his eyes before me—his sunshine eyes."

He opened his desk and took a manuscript out. "Here it is, and because you have thought of him to-day we will all remember him, and I will tell you about my last day with him."

He took his watch out and looked at it. "See this," he said, "he showed it to me the day he came and wanted to see my farm and he said he would give it to me before he died and

that I should do his work instead of him. But I didn't understand how he wanted to create a new parish, and even less how I was going to do it. There is nothing out of the ordinary or brainy about me.

"But there are things which I first understand now—or I don't think I understand them yet, but begin to see a bit of light, as in the morning before the sun comes out and everything begins to be visible.

"It was a short time before he died, I sat in his room with him and he said the things which are written here. You must pardon my saying so, but it will perhaps not mean the same to you as it does to me because I heard him say it.

"That day he took out his watch and said, 'Now is the time to give you this. You are to wear it always and you will never see it unless you think of me, and the work I want you to do.'

"And that is the truth, I can't see it without thinking of him. But when he lay there talking about death, just as we others talk about our work to-morrow, I couldn't help asking, I—yes, who sometimes don't believe and sometimes don't think what I am saying, I asked:

"'Are you sure, Hans, there is a God?'

"He laughed, and I thought it was rather strange, because it was very serious for me, that question. He then smiled teasingly, I could almost say ironically, and answered:

"'Do you have to ask me, who am about to die, to find out there is no God and has never been one.'

"'So it has happened to you as it has happened to so many others—your knowledge has stolen your belief,' and I couldn't understand him lying there so happy, facing death as he was.

"'Knowledge,' he said, and it is the first time I have ever heard his voice impatient—'Ah! all you who fear the result of science have no belief, only a contract.'

"I didn't understand what he meant, and he saw it and explained.

" 'Old documents,' he said, 'wherein humanity have drawn up a contract with God—in the way they understand Him and the world.—But the way to God does not lie in the belief in old documents, but through the belief which is experience from the beginning.'

" 'Then I can't see any difference between the one who believes and the one who doesn't.'

" 'The difference lies in the mind,' he answered, 'in the mind and in the depth of happiness. That is, mind which receives existence as a holy thing. The one who experiences the holiness of existence, experiences God. Happiness arises at the receiving of strength, which flows into the mind and renews the strength which never stops.

" 'Do you remember Rasmus Snak's story about the angel who quarrelled with Adam at the gates of Paradise? Rasmus forgot something which I will now tell you: Adam became frightened when the angel drew his sword; but then the devil whispered, "Shut the gate!" Adam did, and people were all shut out of Paradise. Only God and the people who were made in His image can open the gates again, and none of them can do it without the others willing them to do it.

" 'There have been people who have opened the gate and shown their fellow men that it was open; their disciples said to the world: "See, he has shown us God and opened the gates of Paradise for us!" While they said it they were rubbing their hands lovingly over the gate, and shutting it without noticing it.

" 'Do you doubt, Jesus opened the gate and the Christian teachers in good faith closed it again shortly after his death?

" 'God is constantly willing to come to the gate and awaken people to the fact there is eternal life. You can all learn in the

world's history, how at times He has blown His spirit out over the earth, so that it could be noticed in the peoples' lives.

"Now we once again have God's spirit breathed over us, and all of us must open ourselves to carry God's message and life in us as living witnesses that He is here.

"What are we people in this parish? Can we save the world? About that you are not to ask, but go on working on your farms. When every field is worked well the parish is rich. Whether it was the tenant or the owner who started makes no difference.

"When every mind is whole and clean, the parish is saved, and it makes no difference if it was intelligent and richly talented, or if it is just Peder Quiet, or you, or me, who first felt God's spirit breathe and received it."

"God's spirit breathe," I said. "Yes, there are really times when I think I feel it."

"Then give those moments a chance to stay," he answered. "Be careful with them; don't grasp after them to strengthen yourself, don't make them into an enjoyable intoxication. Then you will one day know God exists, in the same way you know you yourself exist.

"And if you want an example, look at Peder Quiet. The essence of God lies like a gentle whisper around him; in everything he sees lies the feeling that he knows God has created it.

"When this feeling becomes certainty, no one will ask if there is a God, any more than he now asks if there is such a thing as existence; because he will receive his experience direct.

"There where Peder Quiet stands, you should begin. You should be like him and not like the others. Their moments fly singly, like sparks, which most likely come from a common fire but don't make a flame. They sow, and harvest, and talk politics, and go to church and to festivities, but you can't see

which soul there has bought or sold, drunk away or prayed, for their life's moments are like a hand full of cards which are played one after another, and when the last card is played no one knows who was playing them, only that they went through the hands of someone.

"'But Peder Quiet is himself in everything he does. There where he stops and in unconscious prayer takes off his cap—you shall take off your shoes—and go on. Then you won't ever again ask if there is a God, because you have let Him into your life, and henceforth He will lead you.'

"When he had said this he lay there quietly and was a little tired. It was only a few days before he died. When he had rested a few minutes, I said:

"'You have talked to me about God but you have said nothing about religion.'

"He looked at me, as if he felt sorry for my small amount of understanding, and said:

"'I say you must be yourself entirely, in everything you do, when you work and when you love. That means the same as religion, my good friend.

"'I don't say which farm you should work or which wife you should take, or how many children you should have, or which church you should go to on the seventh day. I say: there shall not be six days in your week and one day more which doesn't resemble the others; there shall be seven days in your week and no difference in them, because you must live in each day yourself.

"'The farm you will work will most likely be your father's old farm. The religion which for you expresses holy life, will most likely be your father's old religion.

"'But you must work them both in your own way, not in your father's way. Often you will think, "That's the way father used to do it," and you will honour his idea and his work, but

if you yourself can go ahead and renew, you are carefully to set aside the old method which was his, and work your farm and your belief in your own way and time. Religion must spring out of life, if it doesn't do that it's not good for life; and those who are at fault in this are life's enemies, and therefore also God's, even though they call themselves the servants of God.—

“‘Now that I am about to depart from this life, I have not been able to accomplish for this life all I wanted to. But I do as Peder Quiet and say, yes, to bad weather and good weather, to ease and discomfort, and to life and death.

“‘I say yes to death although I am young and love life; you, on the other hand, shall say yes to life for a long time, and do my duty here for me.

“‘I now give you my watch, “Sun-heaven,” I call it, which gave me strength. Sun-heaven shall enter your thoughts when you look at this watch which resembles the sun when it has just come up and we can look at it without hurting our eyes. There is magic in it, Niels. When I am dead it will remind you that Saint Peter demanded all moments for God's eternal life. You won't be able to look at this watch without remembering every minute is God's. There is a second hand also; it ticks in time with your heart, and tells you every beat of it is God's.

““Then you go out into the fields and plough eternal life out of the soil, because what Rasmus Snak said is true. It is here amongst us. You will find it in the earth, farmer that you are. You sow the grain in your unbelievably living earth, and it answers by sowing eternity in you; the grain grows in the fields, and eternal life grows in you, and when harvesting time comes it is a festivity—And in your presence, while you live, people will become happier and better than in any other place.’”

Niels stopped, laying the watch on the table, its delicate tick—tick—tick was for quite awhile the only sound in the room—peculiarly alive it lay there—almost like a part of Hans' soul. They had all seen him wearing it.

"This is what made me so moved and so upset when you came," said Niels. "You came to me with the same demand and the same belief in me that Hans did. A demand, or call, I have always felt, but a belief I have never felt sure of. One moment I felt I saw my place amongst you. While I now mention this I don't know if it sounds like too much or like nothing, but it is like this, explained very slightly.

"You have all been like professors in a home-made country University, each in his own subject and all the others as pupils, I alone as the pupil of you all.

"But when I am doing my work in the field and a thought comes to me about a stone I'm throwing away—how it came to exist, and how it got here, there suddenly comes a smile over my face and during the lunch hour I ring up Anton on the telephone and say I'm coming over this evening because there is something I want to know about. A glad smile spreads over Anton's face, and he rings up all the others who have a telephone and says Niels is coming over this evening; he wants to know about something! and so the same smile spreads over all your faces. This smile binds us together.

"And yes—this was what came over me so suddenly before. It was as if I stood there creating something. I will be a careful professor in this smile which binds us together.

"It's nothing to talk about, but I was quite overcome by it. I suppose it is because this is all I can do, I know very well it's not much."

"No, it's only the whole thing," remarked Kristian, "it is as Albert said, the whole wooden-shoe. Can't you understand we others lie on the outer edge, but you are the centre of the cir-

cle. You must understand our fields are something we 'have,' and our subjects are something we 'know'—and there are enough people who 'know'—but the smile you talk about and which you call forth; that comes out of something which we are."

There came a clearness and a warmth to Niels as when the sun comes over the horizon and changes the dawn to day.

"I begin to understand," he said. "It was just what Hans said when I talked about his talent for learning. He said: 'There are enough who can.'"

"He put all his talents aside, and gathered his whole being together to enable himself to live so that we could never forget him nor his demand on our lives.

"And I think he, in this way, got a knowledge which people seek hopelessly, always hopelessly."

## Chapter 28

### THE WHITE BRIDAL DRESS

THE house stands where it always stood. The trees stand unchanged in the garden; the bees hum the same old tune. Behind the window she sits with her sewing machine, as before she sat with her lessons. Here she has lived her whole rich, but uneventful life, except the short expectant, but lonely time she worked for Niels' mother.

It is of no consequence whether there stands a house here by the road or not; it means nothing if there is a seamstress more or less in the world. She never stays to think if she is unnecessary or not; she's here because she is here, and she lives peacefully, she doesn't wish to stay and she doesn't wish to leave. She is comfortable; her being rests in an existence whose depth her mind never probes, where happiness and unhappiness never reach her.

Once they sat at her table: Karna was learning to sew.

"Why do you want to learn to sew?" asked people, "one seamstress is enough in this village."

Karna answered with a smile: "I have my own reasons." She continued to have her reasons a long time after she had learned to sew as well as Trine; she continued to live with her. Every now and then Niels came to visit them. In the beginning Karna was in his way and he looked beyond her. After a while these two girls were such close friends he grew used to seeing them together, and looked as much at one as at the other. Karna talked most and before he knew it he was as confidential with her as with Trine. One day he noticed his voice was different to her when he was alone with her than

when Trine was there; there seemed to be a secret between them. He thought the secret was Trine; and so it was; but not as he thought. There was something about this secret which spread a glory over Karna's beauty, a look of adoration it was called in the old days, for there was a sort of magic in it.

That which happened to Karna comes quite evenly and naturally to some places in the country. It is altogether too easy for a young girl to say "yes," and thereafter she stands by herself, which doesn't mean she is exactly looked down upon, but she is not held in respect; most people keep her at a little distance, because too many have been close to her. It is known that she is kind. One day she is that sort no longer, she has become unapproachable and no one knows why, but one accepts the condition as one accepts a change in the weather. Time passes and the good weather proves permanent. There is no bad weather any more and one forgets about it, and if one should remember it, it is so long ago that it doesn't matter. No one remembers the nice girl's not quite nice past, but takes her as she is. If her life is not clean one looks at her with clean eyes, as she herself looks at the world; the hand which has been washed is clean.

One evening Karna put her needle away and said:

"In May I move from here."

"Are you going to start your own sewing establishment?" asked Trine. Karna answered:

"I am not going to sew, I never wanted to sew."

"Why did you ask me to teach you, and why did you stay with me so long?"

"I had my reasons. I will tell them to you soon, but not now."

She took a job on a farm and stayed there a year. Toward the end of April she came to Trine and said:

"The banns are being put up in church next Sunday for Niels and me."

Trine looked up surprised. So that was the reason Niels had come so seldom this last year.

"It surprises you," said Karna. "It surprised us too, so I'm coming to you to say thank you."

"Thank you?" asked Trine, "what for?"

"Not for Niels—yes, for him also, but not because you wouldn't have him. But I am only getting him because I, in a way, am walking in your shoes. I came to you to learn to sew, but more for something else. This is the second time I care for someone who loved you. Of course Niels cared for you before he did me, and if you had wanted him it would never have been me. The other I couldn't even lift my thoughts to, but I promised myself I would walk in his footsteps—although far behind him. That is why I came to you; I couldn't walk that way alone. With your hand in mine, whom he had loved, I knew I could. That is why I came, and when I felt sure of my way, I left. After this I shall walk together with the one who is to carry on Hans' wish and duty in this parish."

Trine sat awhile before she could find anything to say. At last she said:

"There will come a great richness to you now, and you deserve it, and Niels deserves it too, because you are yourself rich, much richer than I. Every time we sat talking about Hans it seemed you understood him far better than I—who could only love him."

"The one who follows a bit behind can sometimes see the whole person better than the one who walks beside him. It wasn't necessary for you to understand, you only had to be there. Ah! Trine, you don't know it yourself, but you have sewed pure, white, bridal-dresses for all the young girls here in the village. Even for me—Yes, it is true: I understand him

better, but you are nearer to him, and this nearness is your strength and your influence over us. You are his, but you belong to all of us. To me he said there should be a fence around me, and I am now putting Niels' fence around my life, and no one shall pull it down."

In the evening Niels came to tell Trine how he had come to love Karna.

He didn't succeed in explaining it; both he and Trine knew too little about Geology; and it could only be explained geologically because it lay in creation itself. God was still working at it, and Karna was transformed and stood newly made, womanly pure, and he himself, saw and was dazed and felt creative strength in himself.

## Chapter 29

### THE PARISH WHICH GREW INTO PARADISE

THE tractors carry on, the wheels revolve; all around the air glistens with the dance of working materials. There isn't a more wide awake and busy parish in the whole of Fyen's diocese. In spite of this it is a pleasant rest to wander along its paths. The white-washed and newly painted farms and houses light up the surroundings like the day itself. Work is carried on diligently behind the walls, and still there is a quiet wave of happiness over them; they look like birthday presents all of them. One understands that it must take constant work to keep it all so beautiful, but one imagines the man has only amused himself doing it, just as he amused himself with smaller things when his father was the man. What time of the day does he do all this redecorating! He is always finished with it when you pass by. There must be rain and mud and wind on Fyen and its surrounding islands, just as in any other place, but one remembers it always in the sunshine. When a child from this district once let God have a moving day one can understand he moved Him into the "Sun-heaven."

Now he is there himself and is "sun entirely." The grave with his dates on is taken care of down here by Trine. Beside it is the cross with his father's and mother's dates on. The father died first, and the mother buried him believing he died in "the truth" because one dies believing unless one says differently while we live. The danger only comes when one lives so strongly in "the truth" that it grows new shoots. Then comes consternation. Now she sleeps her old woman's sleep down here, and it is difficult enough to imagine she might, as

a kind of wandering soul, be thinking her little thoughts somewhere else. It is just as difficult to believe her good, honest love will never be able to do any more good or create any happiness either here or in the great beyond!—

Maren Karsten's got cancer of the stomach. That can almost give one one's childish belief back again. It was just like Maren to get cancer of the stomach. Karsten lives with Kristian and talks a lot and loudly of the latest modern things. He sold his farm too quickly after Maren's death. Now he has nothing to be the leader of and nothing to improve. Thank God for Politics and such things that continually arise. After restless fidgeting, restless talk is best. Then he has his radio to which he can listen, and talk about any other subject he likes at the same time.

His contemporaries look a bit antique; the country's original pioneers, who are not worn out but are left in peace by the new masters.

Their king is Niels. He is broad of shoulder and broad of brow; he has reached his full growth, a strong natural personality stamps him. He doesn't distinguish himself by dazzling qualities, but he is the centre and strength of all the parish movements.

Rasmus Snak is still alive, but not for long—he says so himself. He talks a bit still, but not much. He has written his "memoirs," but there is something in his face when you mention them, which makes one believe these "memoirs" are lies and Latin from one end to the other. He is so old now that he is just middle height; in the old days he was considered tall.

Trine keeps on sewing dresses—white bridal dresses and plain women's clothes. Once in awhile two children come and visit her and say, "Auntie." They are Niels' son and daughter. They are called Hans and Trine, but they are brother and sister. Ah yes, she was in a way only a sister herself.

Trine's beauty has become a legend in the parish; it is undying, but one must belong to the parish to be able to see it. A stranger sees only a middle-aged seamstress with mild eyes and a friendly smile, and finds nothing in the face which proves she had once been unusually beautiful. If he gets a chance of looking a long time into the mild eyes, there will come a light after a while in his own mind, and he will feel a happiness, which beauty and goodness together recall—but he then no longer sees Trine's plain ordinary features, only her expression.

Just such a stranger, who knew the parish people from many summer vacations spent there, came one day with Rasmus Snak to Trine's house. She was outside, working in her garden, and Rasmus Snak got the conversation going about old and new things. Rasmus was one of those who believed in Trine's beauty and he said so:

"What do you do that you continue to look just as young and beautiful as ever?"

Trine took it just as seriously as it was meant. She was young in her feelings of both herself and life. Her beauty she saw in others' eyes—the only place she had ever seen it.

"You told us a story one time about two young men," she answered, "who had to choose if they would rather be united eternally as one with the one they loved, or be satisfied to keep her as she was now, and never get any further. He who chose the first never grew old. You must know why I will remain young until my death—I chose the same as he—and I have often thought 'he' was yourself."

"No," said Rasmus quietly. "I was the other one."

One seldom saw him so serious—without the smallest glint of humour. He stood looking down, as if he were looking down into the depth of his many years. Suddenly he lifted his head briskly and said lightly:

"We were going over to visit King Niels."

"I think I will come along and see the little ones," said Trine.

It was as cleanly brushed and polished as a parlour floor, in Niels' farm-yard.

"It's so clean in this yard, you ought to have a spittoon in it."

A while after he sat in the living room, trying to tease Niels; it didn't work as well as one had expected, his sympathy with the young parish king was only too obvious. He was very anxious the stranger should really understand the work which had been done: The young who had been sent to Niels Bukh and had now returned home, taught gymnastics and all kinds of sport in the parish, in the community hall and the library, and there was the quartet, made up of young farmers, which played Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven.

Afterwards he could criticise, but only to make Niels talk. Rasmus had grown old, the sharpness had fallen from his attacks.

"So you are going to have the quartet here this evening?" he asked, "but what do you want with it when you have your radio?"

"Of course I have radio, telephone, and all modern improvements, but that's no argument."

"There are just as good things on the radio," teased Rasmus.

"Of course one can enjoy the radio," admitted Niels—our four country musicians are not such well-known artists as those we hear on the radio, but we get experience from these four boys; when they play creation is in progress, and we are joined into it and grow with it.

"All these mechanical diversions can give us a great deal of pleasure, but no future growth. And a farmer must see that things grow."

Rasmus nodded like a teacher who is examining, and his eyes glanced quickly at the stranger, the censor. But at last he drew a deep sigh and said honestly and very tiredly:

"Yes—this is a wonderful parish—but how long will it last? How long will you stick together?"

"What would part us?" asked Niels.

"Politics."

Niels smiled.

"Our life's feelings come from a deeper layer of earth and are not disturbed by the colour of our horses or the colour of our politics."

"Religion then. Some of you never go to church and yet some of you even go to the altar."

"Quite right," answered Niels, "but that which unites us is our feeling of the wholeness of life; from that we praise our existence. Some of us sing the old well-known hymns and preferably in church; others hum our own songs in the fields with our work. It isn't always that one finds words, but the tune we hum is our own and comes from the inmost part of ourselves and goes straight into heaven."

"You know, I suppose, there are a lot of young folk who sing other songs?" complained Rasmus, but Niels answered quietly:

"Does that hinder us in singing ours? Don't we belong to life as well and have to be true to it, as it expresses itself through us."

"So you go to your work singing yourselves into heaven?" said Rasmus.

"Look out over the parish," said Niels. "Can't you see the difference? Don't you see the farms and houses standing in a new light? It's the light from the inhabitants' minds, and that means the parish is growing steadily and quietly into heaven."

"Look!" he pointed out into the yard, where a shiny curry-

combed red stallion was being led out of the stable. An excess of life snorted out of his nostrils. "If it had gone anywhere near Noah, don't you think he would have taken him along in the Ark?"

They went out to look at the horse; the stranger wandered into the sun-room; the perfume of roses was wafted through the open window. He walked over to it. Behind the roses stood the summer house; Trine and Karna's voices came from there; they were talking about the stranger. He listened openly.

"Niels says he is hanging around the parish because he wants to write something about us, and that is impossible."

Trine gave a naïve reason why it was possible for the stranger to write.

"Naturally," said Karna, "he can tell how the young hold concerts and have athletic sports, and how the old belch and blow their noses with their fingers. Everyone knows about that. But—what we are—inside, how we are all alike behind our clothes and behind our thoughts—about those things neither he nor any one else can write."

"We can hardly do that ourselves," said Trine. Karna answered:

"We can say it with one word: Hans. It's strange, isn't it; he never had farm or a home: he did no real service; he only got sick and died. He was a glint which flashed across our eyes—and remained in them. We all see it in each others'. It is us."

"That is true," said Trine. "I think so often of a game he used to play: he went up in heaven and let gold oranges fall down on earth. The sun spots lay down here shining from the gold."

"I think so often, now he is in his sun-heaven, and when I look at the faces about us, it seems I can see the sun spots, reflections from his golden oranges."

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